A MARVEL MAGAZINE / WINTER 1980 / 75p

epic™ ILLUSTRATED

Adult fantasy & science-fiction featuring:
Robert E. Howard
Harlan Ellison
Michael Moorcock
& many more

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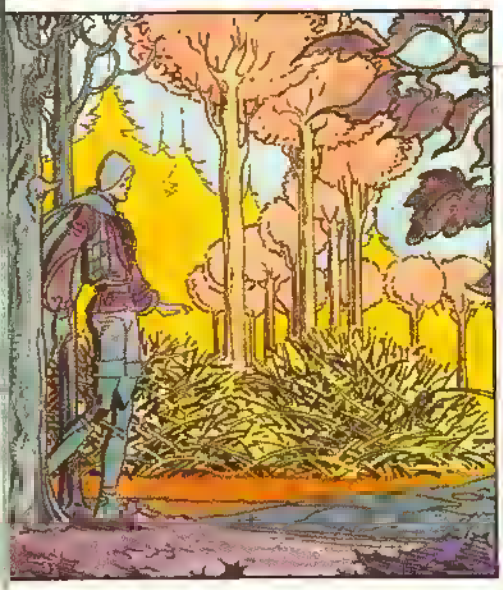

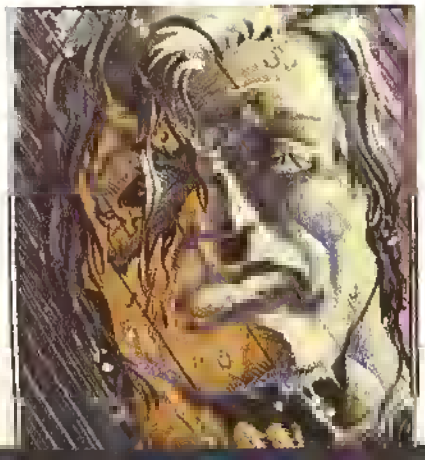

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DELLORAN REVISITED
CHAPTER VII
ONCE THERE WAS A WONDROUS WORLD CALLED DELLORAN WHICH PULSED WITH A LIFE SIX BILLION SOULS STRONG, BUT THEN THE ZYGOTEANS CAME.
NOW ALL THAT REMAINS IS A POCKMARKED ATOMIZED MEMORY AND TWO STRANGE VISITORS, WHO SEEM STRANGELY UNAFFECTED BY THE NUCLEAR DEATH THAT STILL BLOWS IN THE WIND.
HE'S STILL HERE I CAN SENSE HIM...
WHO'S STILL HERE?
©1980 J.P. Starlin

THE ONE WE'VE COME TO MEET. THIS PLANET IS *HIS* HOME.
YOU SURE YOU DON'T MEAN '*WAS HIS HOME*'.
THIS PLACE IS SO NUKED OUT I DOUBT IF *ANYTHING* HAS LIVED HERE FOR *YEARS*.
YES... THIS TRULY IS ANOTHER MONSTROUS EXAMPLE OF THE ZYGOTEANS' *DEPRAVITY*... A MADNESS THAT MUST BE STOPPED, AND WILL BE...
... BY US.
THERE YOU GO WITH THAT '*US*' STUFF AGAIN.
YOU SEEM TO HAVE IT ALL MAPPED OUT, THE SECRET WAY *WE'RE* GOING TO BEAT DOWN A RACE OF KILLERS THAT HAVE ALREADY WASTED HALF THE GALAXY.
THE ONLY THING YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT IS FILLING IN THE *ME* PART OF *WE* ABOUT *HOW!*
IT'S REALLY QUITE SIMPLE...
THERE IS A DEVICE WE OSIROSIANS CREATED, CALLED THE INFINITY HORN. WHEN THAT DEVICE IS ACTIVATED, THE THREAT OF THE ZYGOTEANS WILL END.
WELL, THAT PART OF '*HOW*' IS NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT OR EASY TO EXPLAIN RIGHT AT THIS MOMENT.
OH YEAH?
OH YEAH... HOW SO?

WELL, WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT A TRY ANYHOW. YOU CAN START WITH TELLING ME WHERE THIS HORN IS.
WHERE?... I HAVEN'T THE FAINTEST IDEA.
WHAT?!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?! I THOUGHT YOU ORSIROSIANS MADE IT.
WE DID, BUT... I TOLD YOU IT WOULDN'T BE EASY TO EXPLAIN...
...BUT YOU SEE THE INFINITY HORN PROVED TO BE SUCH A POWERFUL WEAPON THAT WE ORSIROSIANS FELT WE NEEDED A 'FAIL SAFE' BUILT INTO IT SO IT WOULDN'T FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS.
SO I CONSTRUCTED AN ARTIFICIAL IMMORTAL BEING...
...WHO I INSTRUCTED TO HIDE THE HORN ON A FAR-OFF WORLD AND NOT REVEAL ITS LOCATION UNTIL A CERTAIN VERSE WAS RECITED TO HIM BY AN ORSIROSIAN.
HE WAS ALSO ORDERED TO AWAIT THAT ORSIROSIAN HERE ON DELLORAN.
THEN THIS IS ALL A WASTE OF TIME.
NO ONE COULD HAVE SURVIVED THE ATOMIC HOLOCAUST WHICH HIT THIS PLACE.
HE DID.
BY FOLLOWING THE MYSTIC DICTATES OF MY SENSES AS WE'VE BEEN DOING.
SO EVEN IF HE DID, HOW DO WE FIND A LONE MAN ON A WORLD THIS SIZE?
WE SHOULD FIND HIM JUST OVER THE NEXT RIDGE.
BY THE WAY, HIS NAME IS...

...JOENIS SOULE, HEAR MY WORDS.
"THE HAND OF DARKNESS CALLS BUT I AM READY. FOR THE DIM AND HAZY FUTURE I CAN SEE. WHAT IS AND WHAT IS TO BE IS MY BURDEN. LET ALL BECOME AS DARK AS THE SOUL WITHIN ME."
SO YOU'VE COME AT LAST...
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?
IT'S BEEN OVER 100,000 YEARS SINCE WE LAST MET, JOENIS.
THAT LONG...?
I'VE COME FOR THE KEY, JOENIS. YOU STILL HAVE IT, I ASSUME.
WAS I NOT CREATED TO BE ITS GUARDIAN?
FOR 100,000 YEARS I'VE PROTECTED YOUR HOLY KEY FROM PIRATES, DEMONS, THIEVES, MAGICIANS AND ZYGOTEANS.
MANY HAVE SOUGHT MY TREASURE, MANY HAVE DIED.

BUT THE TRAIL OF BLOOD I'VE SPILT PALES BESIDE THE HORROR OF MY CHARGE'S POTENTIAL.
NOW HERE HANGS DEATH ON LEVELS UNDREAMED.
A PERSON CAN'T LIVE WITH DEATH AS LONG AS I HAVE WITHOUT RECOGNIZING ITS MANY FACES AND COMPLEX NATURE.
THEN YOU KNOW ITS SECRET?
YES
FOR A LONG TIME I THOUGHT ABOUT DESTROYING YOUR PRECIOUS KEY...
... BUT YOUR PROGRAMMING WAS TOO STRONG, AND AFTER A WHILE I TOO SAW THE NECESSITY OF WHAT YOU DO.
THE ZYGOTEANS SHOWED ME.
I'VE LIVED ON DELLORAN FOR 100,000 YEARS.
I LEARNED TO LOVE THIS WORLD.

SO HERE'S YOUR DAMN KEY. I AM GLAD TO BE FREE OF ITS BLACK YOKE.
NOW GO AND DO WHAT YOU MUST.

FAREWELL, JOENIS, YOU HAVE SERVED ME WELL.

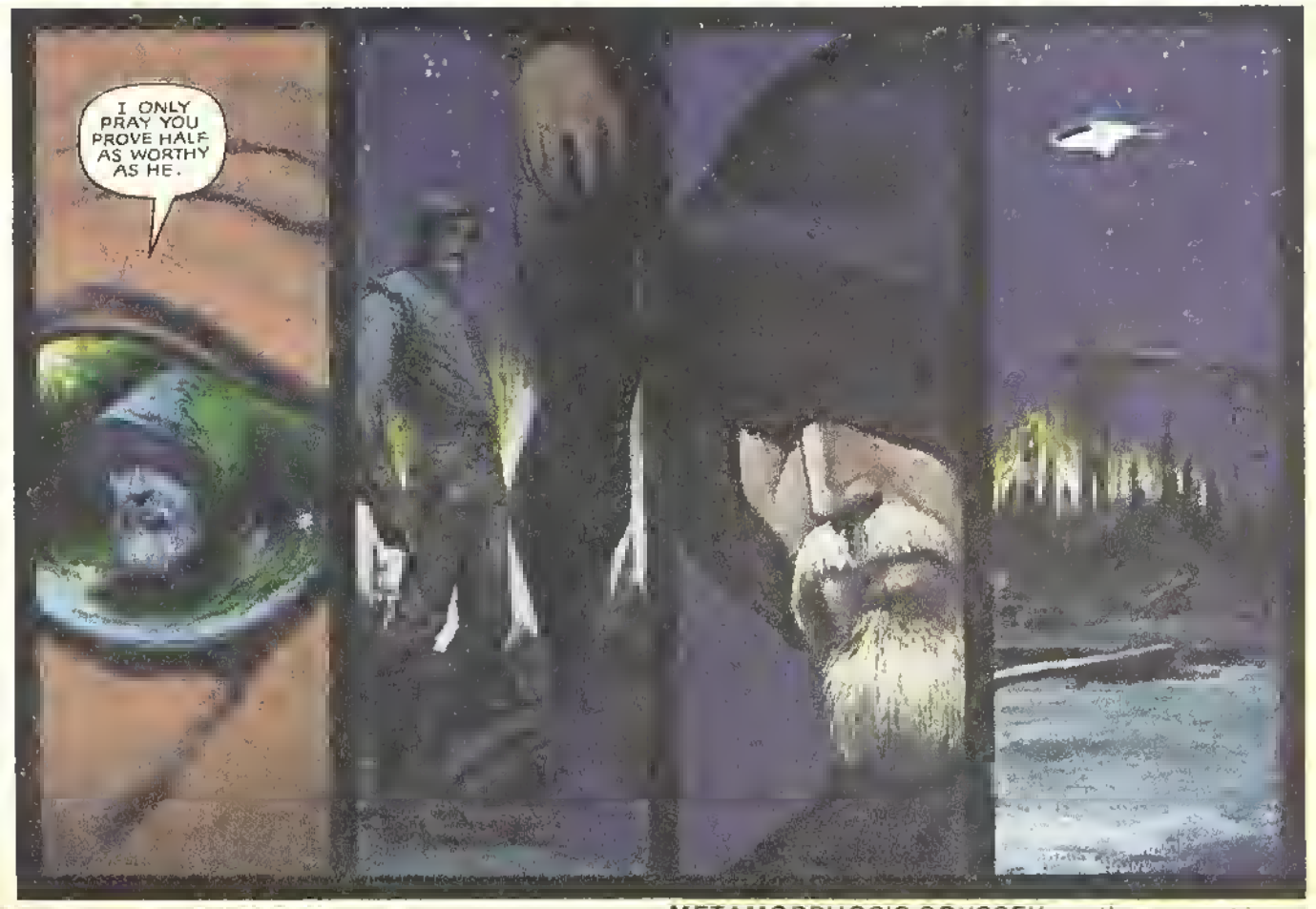
HEY, YOU'RE NOT PLANNING ON LEAVING HIM HERE, ARE YOU?!

WE'VE GOT ROOM FOR HIM ON THE 'LIGHT CUTTER!'
YOU CAN COME WITH US, JOENIS.

NO THANKS, FRIEND. THIS IS MY WORLD AND I'VE NEVER DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR TRAVEL.
BUT THIS WORLD IS... DEAD!

I KNOW... BUT I BELONG HERE.
BUT...

COME ALONG, VANTH.
HEY?! THAT SOUNDED LIKE A RADIUM LASER.
IT PROBABLY WAS. I NOTICED JOENIS HAD ONE IN HIS BAG.

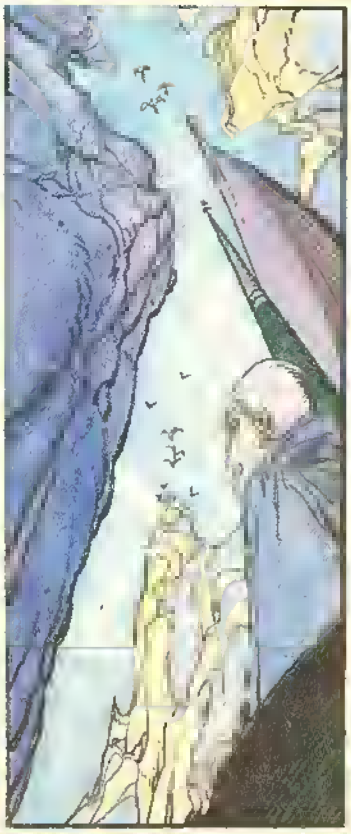


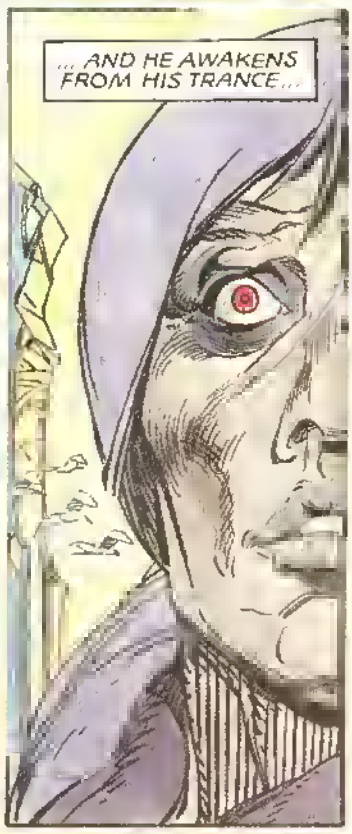
METAMORPHOSIS ODYSSEY continues next issue

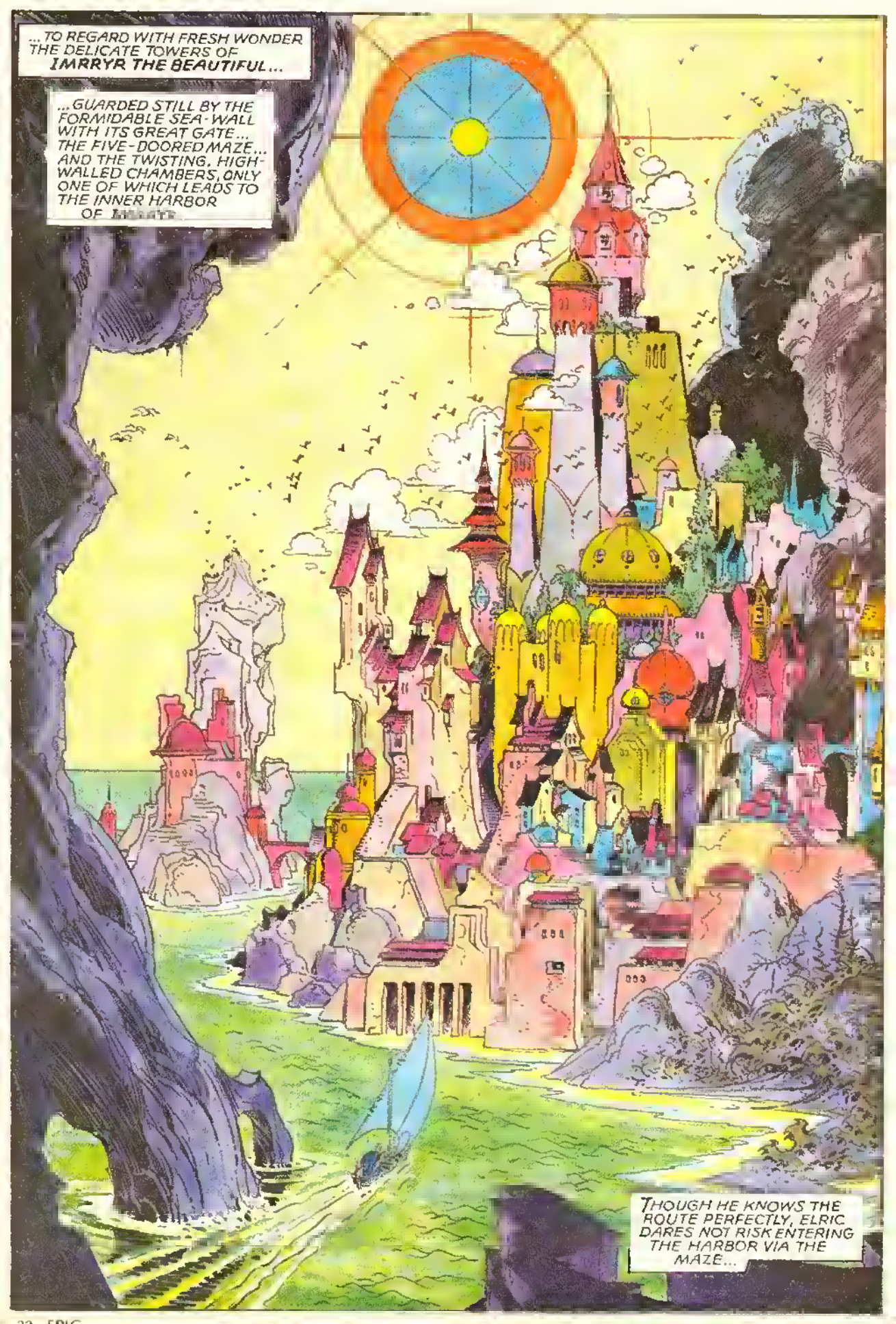
the Dreaming City

Part II

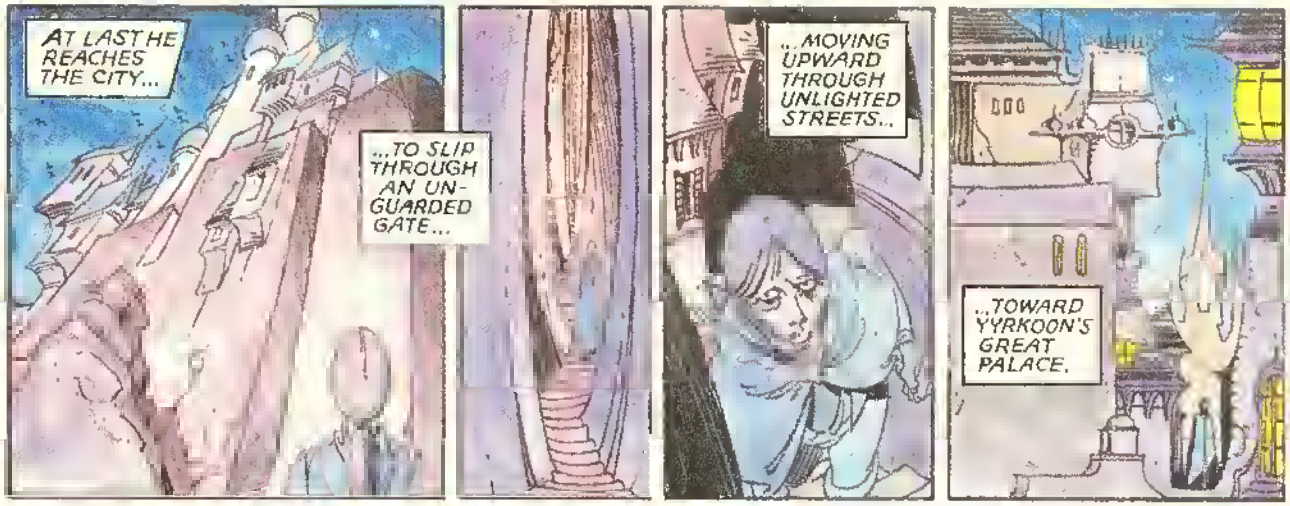
SO IT IS THAT, DRIVEN BY WIND-ELEMENTALS, **ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ** SAILS AT PRETERNATURAL SPEED TOWARD THE LAST CITY STILL RULED BY HIS OWN ANCIENT RACE.

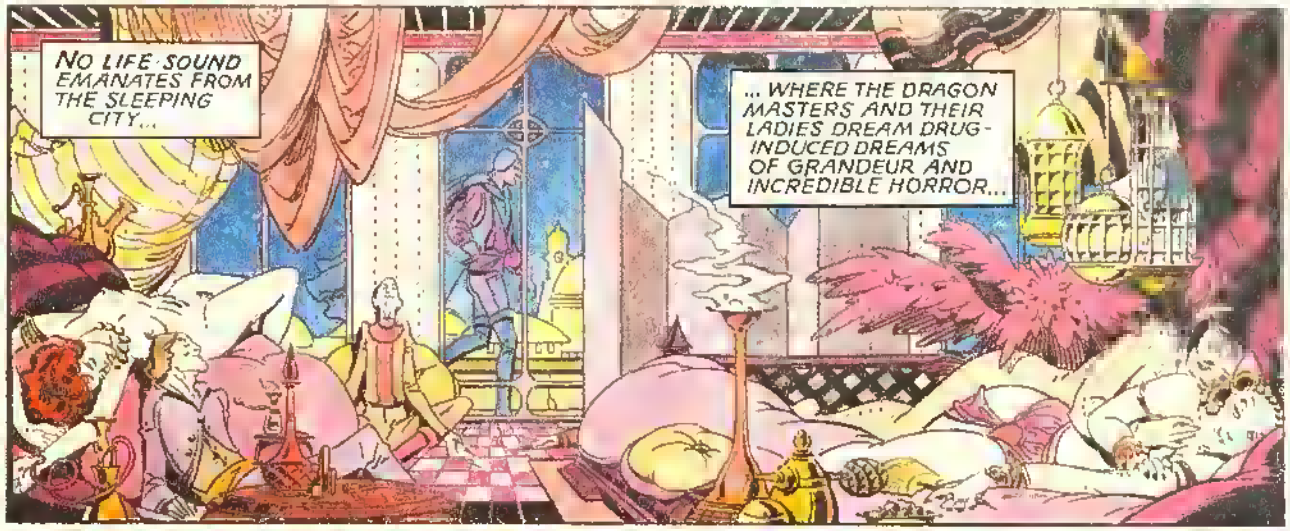




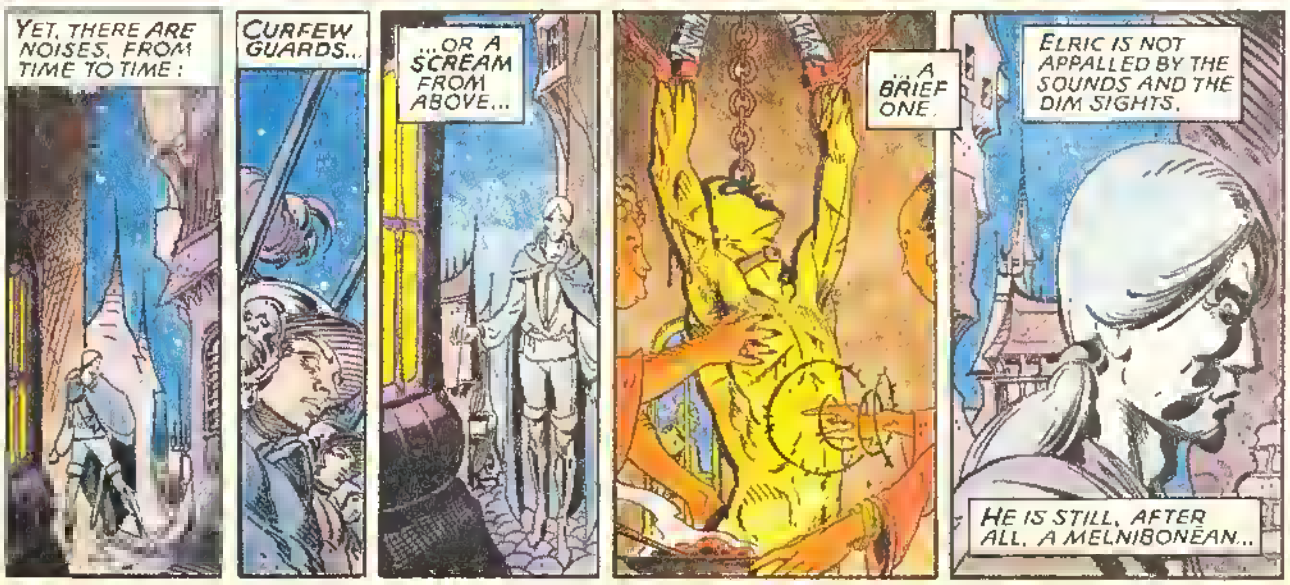

...TO REGARD WITH FRESH WONDER THE DELICATE TOWERS OF IMRRYR THE BEAUTIFUL...
...GUARDED STILL BY THE FORMIDABLE SEA-WALL WITH ITS GREAT GATE... THE FIVE-DOORED MAZE... AND THE TWISTING, HIGH-WALLED CHAMBERS, ONLY ONE OF WHICH LEADS TO THE INNER HARBOR OF
THOUGH HE KNOWS THE ROUTE PERFECTLY, ELRIC DARES NOT RISK ENTERING THE HARBOR VIA THE MAZE...

INSTEAD, HE STEERS HIS BOAT FURTHER UP THE COAST...
...TO A HIDDEN INLET WHERE THICK BUSHES OF NODOIL BERRIES BLOOM.
BERRIES WHOSE JUICES FIRST TURN ONE BLIND, THEN SLOWLY MAD.
ON FOOT, ELRIC STRIDES INLAND TOWARD THE DREAMING CITY, AS THE OCHRE SUN GIVES WAY TO NIGHT...
AND HE THINKS OF HOW MUCH HE HATES HIS COUSIN YYRKOON...
...FOR REASONS WHICH HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH YYRKOON'S USURPING THE RUBY THRONE.
FOR THOSE REASONS, THE ANCIENT CAPITAL WILL FALL THIS NIGHT, IF ELRIC HAS HIS WAY AND THE SEA LORDS FAIL NOT.

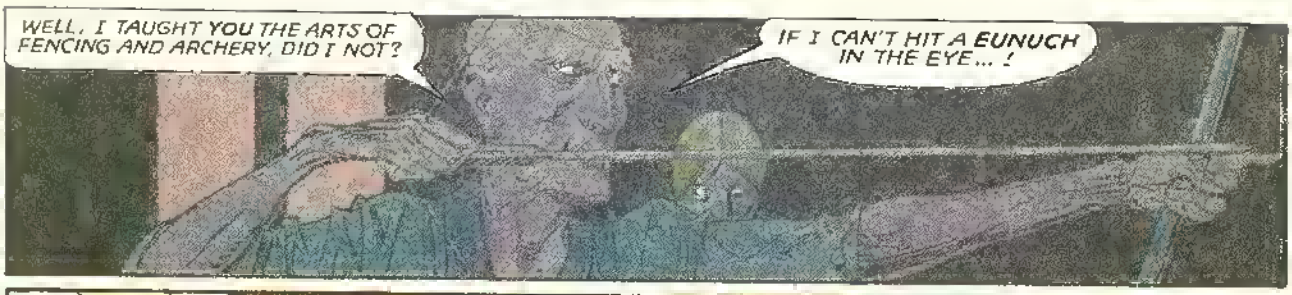

AT LAST HE REACHES THE CITY...
...TO SLIP THROUGH AN UN-GUARDED GATE...
... MOVING UPWARD THROUGH UNLIGHTED STREETS...
...TOWARD YYRKOON'S GREAT PALACE.

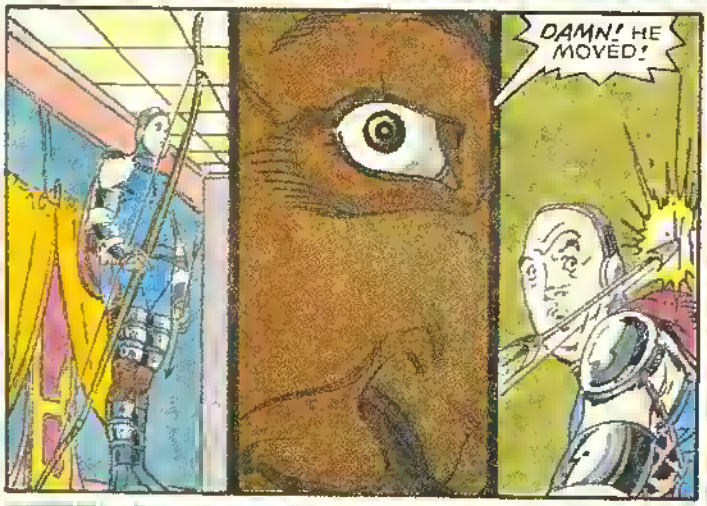

NO LIFE SOUND EMANATES FROM THE SLEEPING CITY...
... WHERE THE DRAGON MASTERS AND THEIR LADIES DREAM DRUG-INDUCED DREAMS OF GRANDEUR AND INCREDIBLE HORROR...

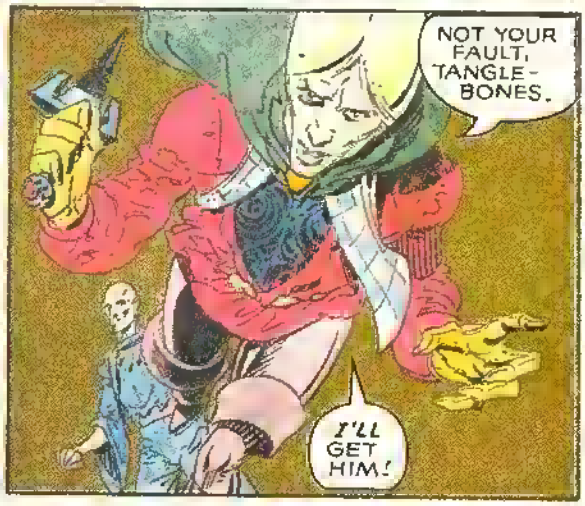
... WHILE THEIR SLAVES TRY NOT TO DREAM AT ALL...

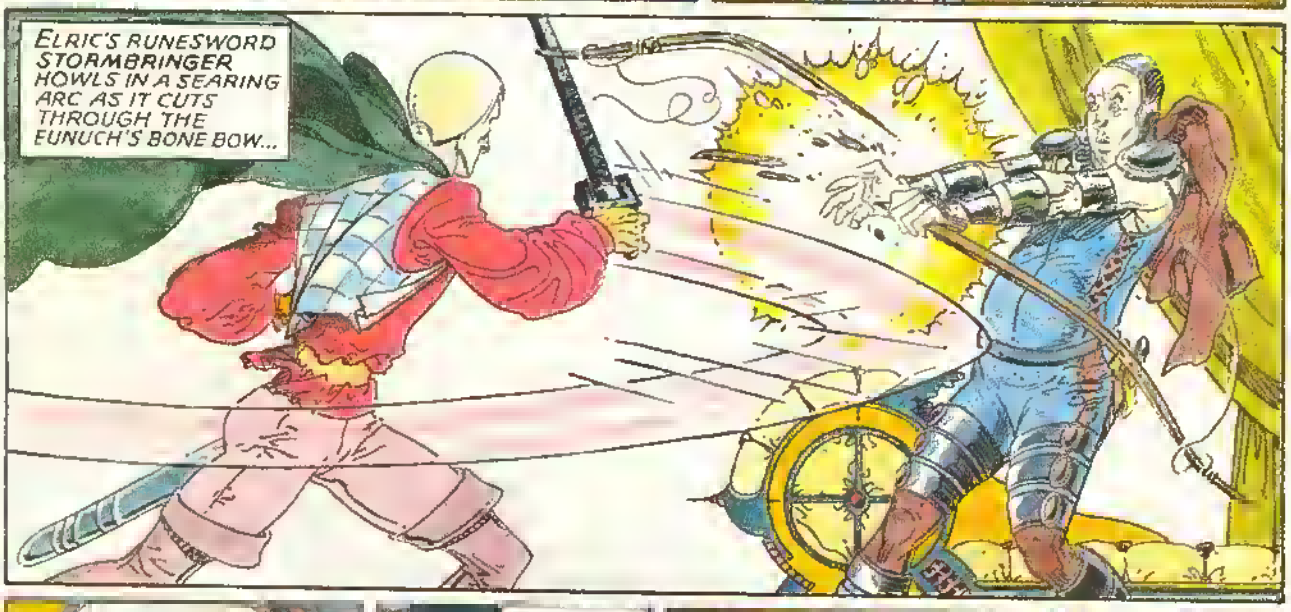

YET, THERE ARE NOISES, FROM TIME TO TIME:
CURFEW GUARDS...
...OR A SCREAM FROM ABOVE...
... A BRIEF ONE.
ELRIC IS NOT APPALLED BY THE SOUNDS AND THE DIM SIGHTS.
HE IS STILL, AFTER ALL, A MELNIBONEAN...

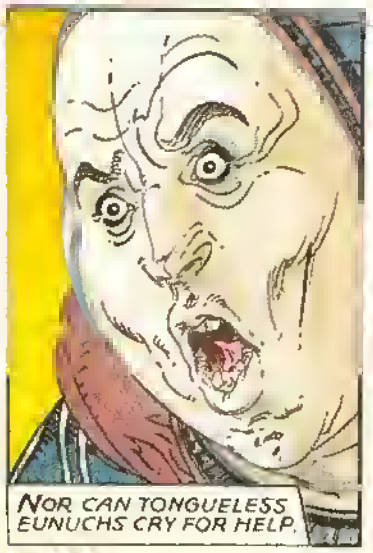
AND EVEN AS HE REACHES A BACK DOOR OF THE PALACE, HE REMEMBERS HIS LIFE IS FORFEIT IF HE IS CAPTURED IN IMRRYR.
A CREAKING SOUND, ABOVE:
IS IT... THE KING?
IT'S PRINCE ELRIC.
YOU FORGET, TANGLEBONES, OLD FRIEND, THAT A NEW KING SITS THE RUBY THRONE.
THE DRAGON ISLE HAS BUT ONE KING, WHATEVER USURPER WOULD HAVE IT OTHERWISE.
SHE... STILL SLEEPS, SIRE.
I GUESSED AS MUCH.
I DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE MY GOOD COUSIN'S POWERS OF SORCERY.
QUIET NOW, SIRE...
ONE OF THE SILENT GUARDS!


WELL, I TAUGHT YOU THE ARTS OF FENCING AND ARCHERY, DID I NOT?
IF I CAN'T HIT A EUNUCH IN THE EYE... !

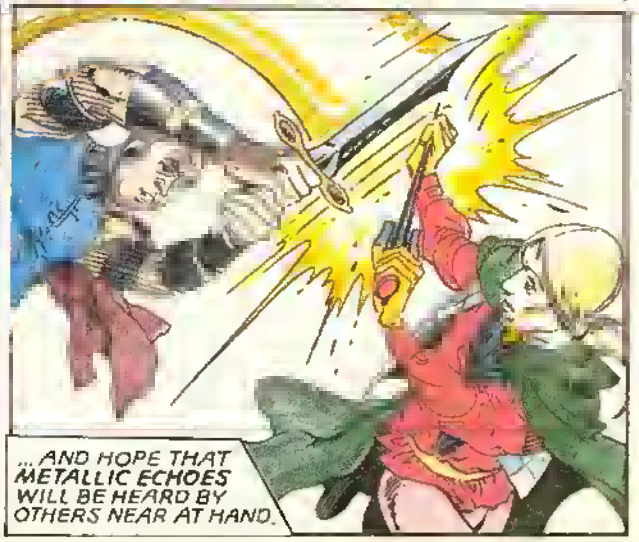

DAMN! HE MOVED!

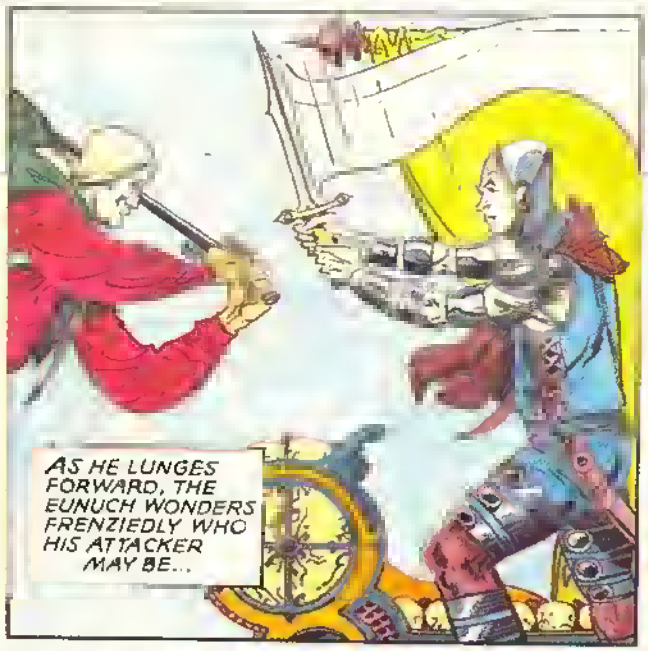

NOT YOUR FAULT, TANGLE-BONES.
I'LL GET HIM!

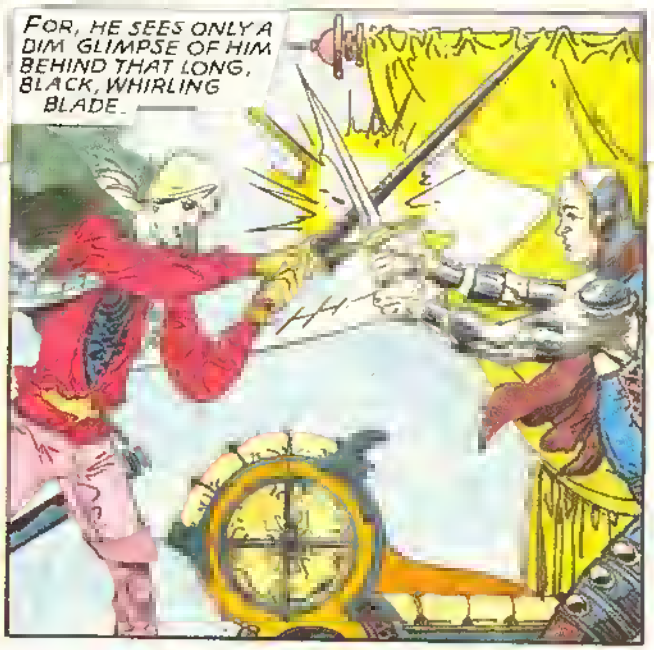

ELRIC'S RUNESWORD STORMBRINGER HOWLS IN A SEARING ARC AS IT CUTS THROUGH THE EUNUCH'S BONE BOW...

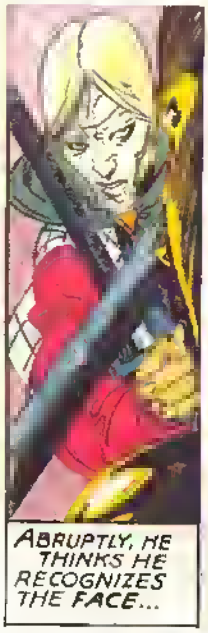

NOR CAN TONGUELESS EUNUCHS CRY FOR HELP.

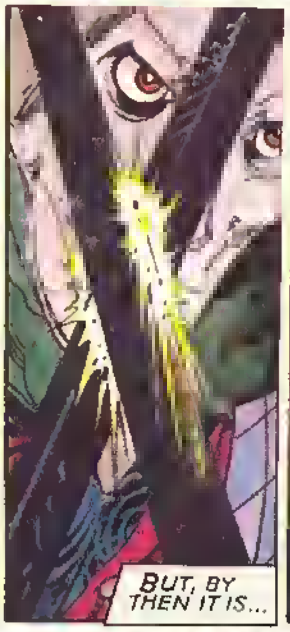
THEY CAN ONLY DRAW SHORT-SWORDS...


...AND HOPE THAT METALLIC ECHOES WILL BE HEARD BY OTHERS NEAR AT HAND.

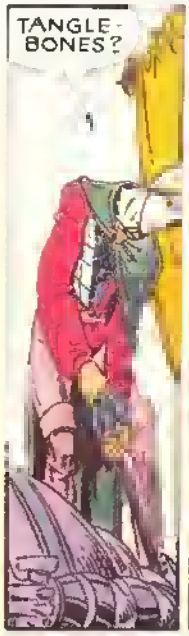

AS HE LUNGES FORWARD, THE EUNUCH WONDERS FRENZIEDLY WHO HIS ATTACKER MAY BE...


FOR, HE SEES ONLY A DIM GLIMPSE OF HIM BEHIND THAT LONG, BLACK, WHIRLING BLADE.


ABRUPTLY, HE THINKS HE RECOGNIZES THE FACE...

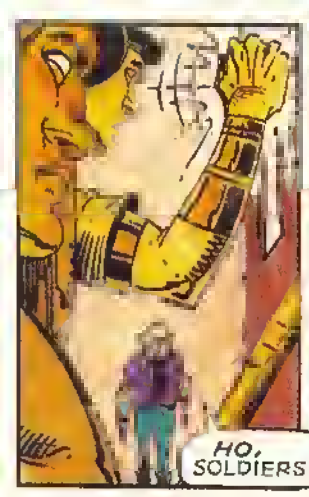

BUT, BY THEN IT IS...

...TOO LATE.


TANGLE-BONES?

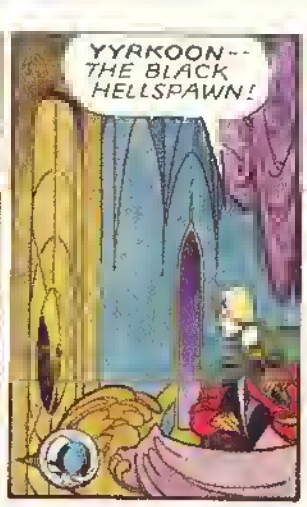
GONE.
BUT WHO--?

AND THERE, BEHIND THE NEWLY-LOCKED DOOR...
CYMORIL...
...COUSIN...
CYMORIL... WAKE UP...
OPEN UP IN THERE!


HO, SOLDIERS--

WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?

HAS SOMEONE TRIED TO SEE MY POOR SLEEPING SISTER?


YYRKOON-- THE BLACK HELLSPAWN!

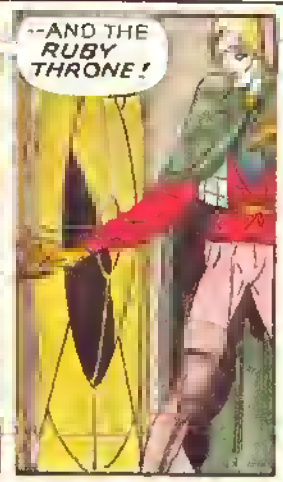
WHOEVER IS IN THERE-- IF MY GOOD SISTER IS HARMED, YOU WILL NEVER DIE-- BUT YOU WILL PRAY TO YOUR GODS THAT YOU COULD!

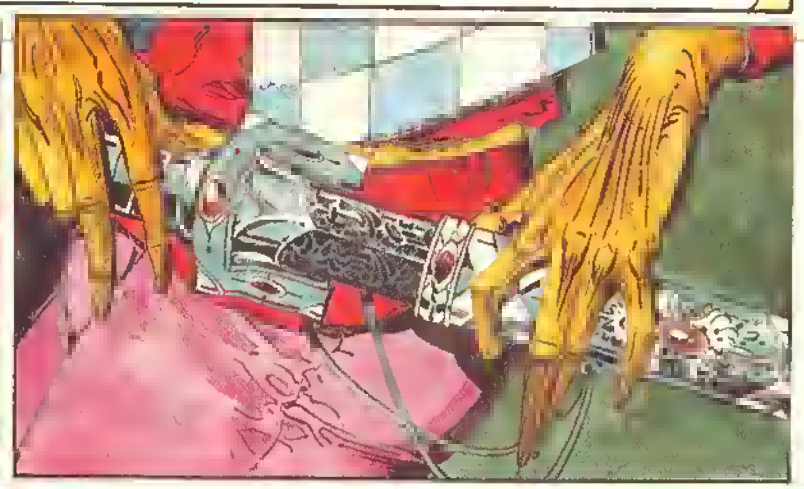
YYRKOON, YOU PALTRY RABBLE-- YOU CANNOT THREATEN ONE WHO IS YOUR EQUAL IN THE DARK ARTS!
ELRIC...?

SO YOU HAVE RETURNED!
WELL, ANY ATTEMPT TO WAKEN MY SISTER WILL NOT ONLY SLAY HER--
--BUT WILL SEND HER SOUL INTO THE DEEPEST HELL--

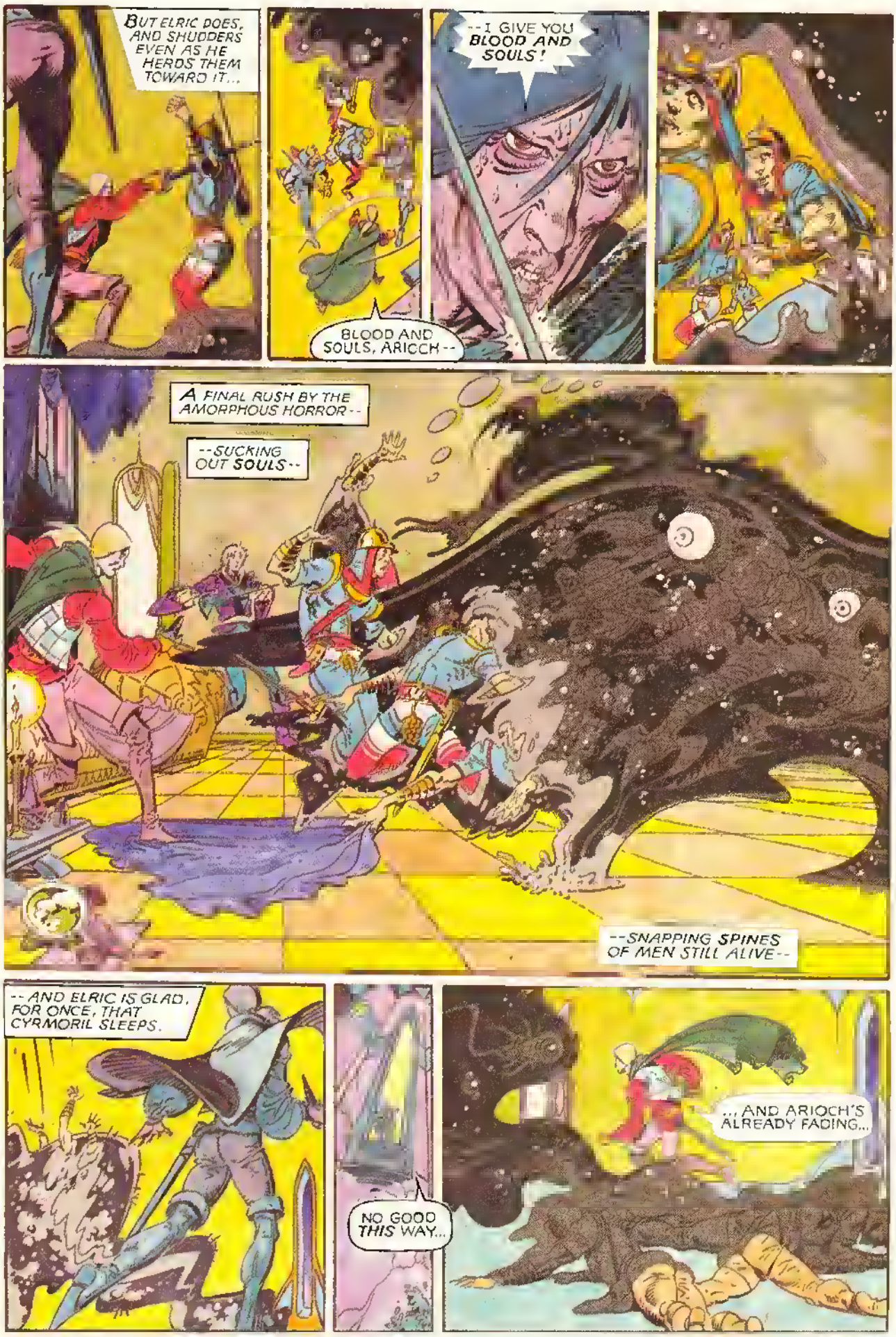
-- WHERE YOU WILL WILLINGLY JOIN IT!
SOLDIERS! BREAK DOWN THE DOOR AND TAKE THAT TRAITOR ALIVE!
THERE ARE TWO THINGS, ELRIC, YOU WILL NEVER AGAIN HAVE--

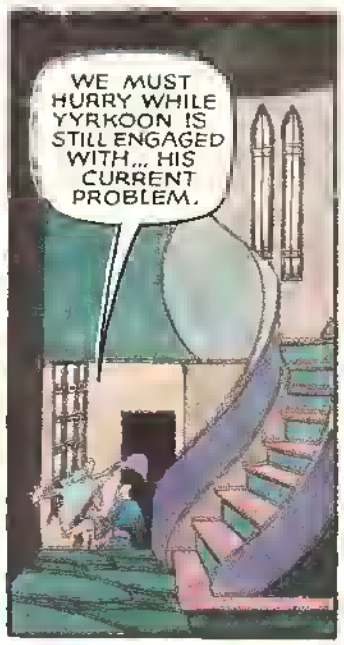
-- MY SISTER'S LOVE--

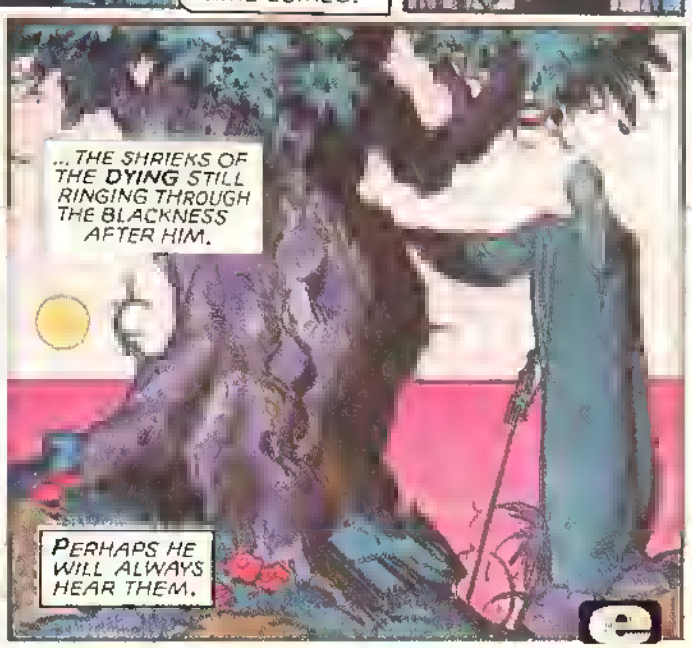

--AND THE RUBY THRONE!



THE DOOR'S UNLOCKED NOW, FOOLS! IN WITH YOU!
YES, SIRE! I'LL--
Eh?
ARIOCH--
HELP ME, ARIOCH--
I GIVE YOU BLOOD AND SOULS! ONLY AID ME NOW!
THIS MAN I GIVE YOU, MIGHTY KING OF HELL...
AND, IN A FAR CORNER OF THE GLOOMY CHAMBER...
AID YOUR SERVANT, ELRIC OF MELNIBONÉ!
GOKK
...A BLACKER MIST BEGINS SLOWLY TO FORM.
ALIVE, DAMN YOU!
I WANT HIM TAKEN ALIVE, TO SAMPLE THE THOUSAND DEATHS!
BLOOD AND SOULS FOR MY LORD ARIOCH!
AID ME, EVIL ONE!
THE WARRIORS DO NOT SEE THE DARK THING IN THE CORNER...


BUT ELRIC DOES, AND SHUDDERS EVEN AS HE HERDS THEM TOWARD IT...
BLOOD AND SOULS, ARIOCH--
--I GIVE YOU BLOOD AND SOULS!
A FINAL RUSH BY THE AMORPHOUS HORROR--
--SUCKING OUT SOULS--
--SNAPPING SPINES OF MEN STILL ALIVE--
--AND ELRIC IS GLAD, FOR ONCE, THAT CYRMORIL SLEEPS.
NO GOOD THIS WAY...
...AND ARIOCH'S ALREADY FADING...





For More On THE DREAMING CITY See Our OVERVIEW Section.

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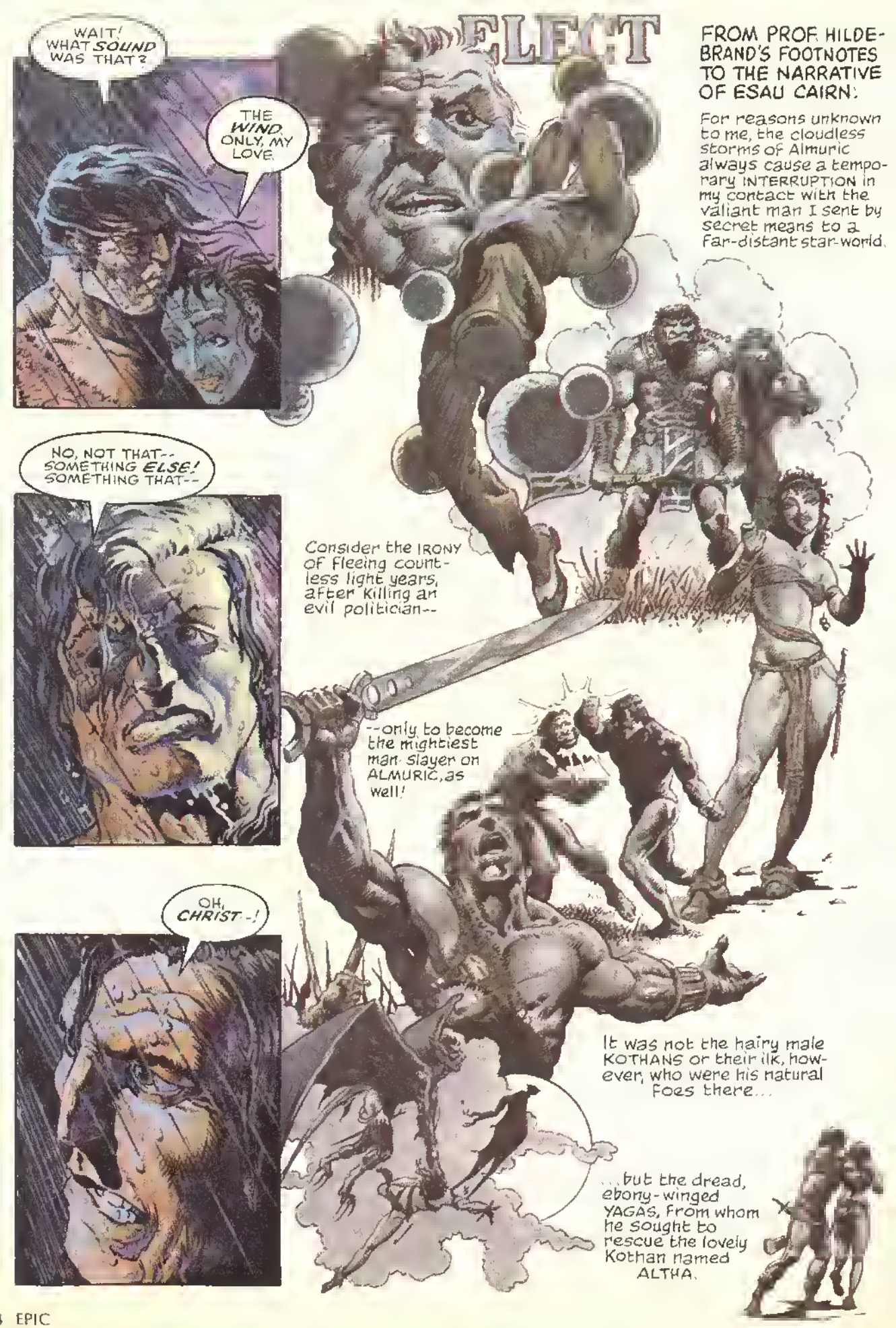

ELECT
FROM PROF. HILDEBRAND'S FOOTNOTES TO THE NARRATIVE OF ESAU CAIRN:
For reasons unknown to me, the cloudless storms of Almuric always cause a temporary INTERRUPTION in my contact with the valiant man I sent by secret means to a far-distant star-world.
WAIT! WHAT SOUND WAS THAT?
THE WIND, ONLY, MY LOVE.
NO, NOT THAT-- SOMETHING ELSE! SOMETHING THAT--
Consider the IRONY of fleeing countless light years, after killing an evil politician--
--only to become the mightiest man-slayer on ALMURIC, as well!
OH, CHRIST--!
It was not the hairy male KOTHANS or their ilk, however, who were his natural foes there...
...but the dread, ebony-winged YAGAS, from whom he sought to rescue the lovely Kothan named ALTHA.

H-H-YAA!
A THUGRAN, ESAU! BEWARE!
HOLD, FRIEND! I'VE NO QUARREL WITH YOU.
ALL WHO ARE NOT THUGRANS ARE OUR ENEMIES!
YET, IF YOU WILL LEAVE ME YOUR WOMAN, PERHAPS I'LL LET YOU--
GO TO HELL, YOU HAIRY DEVIL!
"I've only a brief, chaotic memory of the next few seconds...
ESAU IRON-HAND! MORE OF THEM!
"...a whirl of strokes and parries... a brief clanging of steel...
"...the vision of Altha, fighting as only the women of Almuric can fight...
"...then, the thunder of a blow from behind
UNHH!
"...and the lights went out.

"I came to with the impression that I was lying in a small boat which was rocking and tossing in a storm... though in fact, the sky was clear and bright...

LOGAR! THE DOG IS CONSCIOUS, AT LAST!

LET HIM WALK THEN, IF HE'S ABLE!

MMFF

WELL, YOU HAIRLESS APE? DO YOU REMEMBER LOGAR THE BONE-CRUSHER, WHOSE JAW YOU ONCE UNFAIRLY BROKE?

NO?

THEN PERHAPS THIS WILL REMIND YOU!

UNGN

BEAST! COWARD!

YOU'D NOT DARE FACE HIM IN FAIR BATTLE!

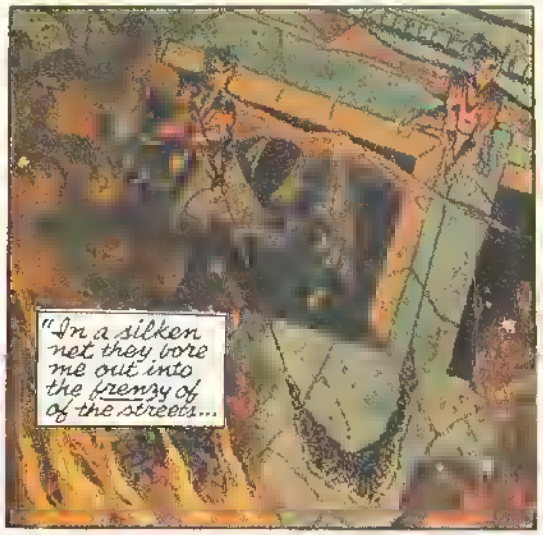
GET HER AWAY--

--AND STAND THE DOG UP!

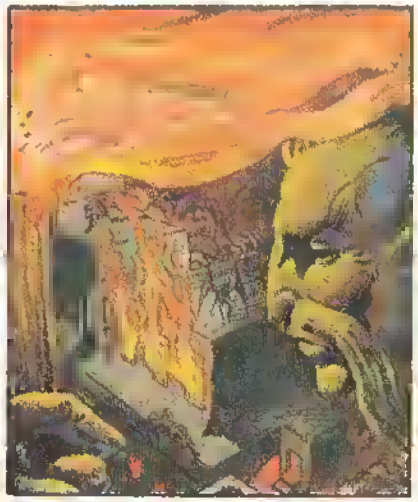
HE CAN'T WALK, LOGAR.
WHY NOT FINISH HIM HERE?
BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE TOO EASY FOR ONE WHO STRUCK ME FOULLY WHEN WE FIRST MET, MOONS AGO--
--STRUCK ME TREACHEROUSLY FROM BEHIND!
YOU LIE! HE STRUCK YOU WITH HIS NAKED FISTS, AS ALL MEN KNOW, BUT YOU WON'T--
SHUT UP, WOMAN!
OHHH
NOW, ON TO THE CITY--
--WHERE I'LL TAKE MY TIME ABOUT KILLING THE DOG!
"and so we came to Thugra, in the midst of a rolling plain...
"...a city which, both from inside and in its inhabitants, was all but identical to my adopted Koth.

"Slow days crawled by, each an exquisite torture to me...
"For, Logar came each day to torment me with obscene tales of his treatment of Altha.
"I knew not whether he lied.
"Then, one midnight, I awoke to the clash of steel, the screaming of women from without.
"There was fighting in the city beyond a doubt--yet who--?
"Then--
ESAU IRON-HAND!
HERE, ALTHA! BUT HOW--?
DOOM, ESAU! DOOM FROM THE SKIES!
THE YAGAS HAVE DESCENDED UPON THUGRA, BY THE THOUSANDS!
THE CITY BURNS EVEN NOW, AND-- OHH!
LOGAR!
IT'S TRUE, DOG--
--THUGRA FALLS!
BUT I'LL REST EASIER IN HELL THIS NIGHT--
--KNOWING YOU PRECEDED ME IN DEATH!
NO! KEEP AWAY FROM HIM!

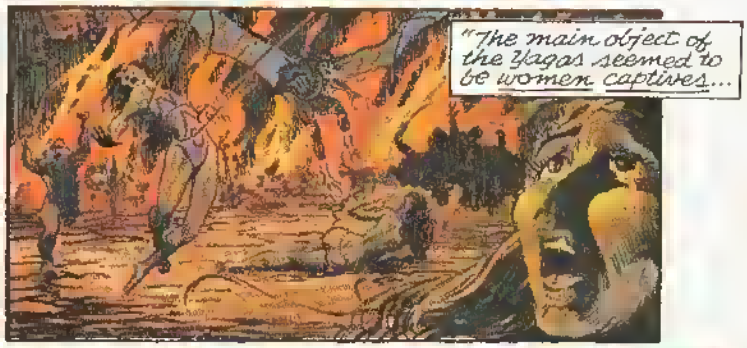
"Yet, it was I myself who kept Logar away, with the full force of my knee against his chin--
"--and the impact must have broken his bull-neck like a rotted twig!
NOW, ALTHA, HURRY AND--
TAKE THEM!--
TAKE THEM BOTH!
WHY THE MAN?
WHO EVER SAW A WHITE-SKINNED MAN, WITH BLUE EYES, BEFORE?
TAKE CARE, THOUGH! HE HAS THE THEWS OF A LION!
I'M SURE THAT ASPECT OF HIM WILL INTEREST YASMEENA...!



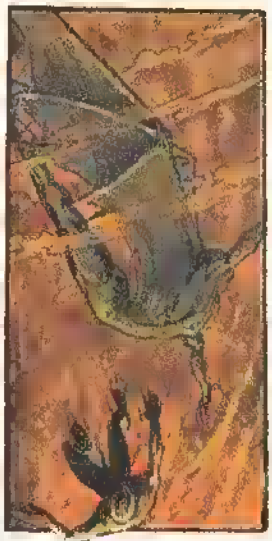
"...where, among burning buildings and crashing walls, the men of Thugra were fighting with the fury of dying panthers.



"Not all the killing was on one side, for any Thugran was more than a match for a single Yaga... but the winged devils far outnumbered them...

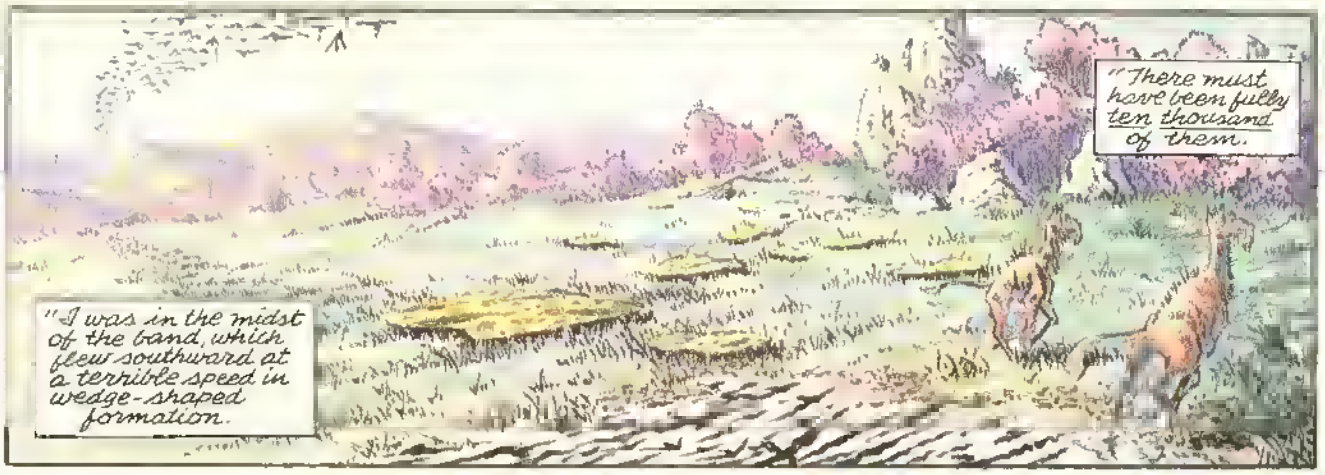


"...and the few Thugran survivors fired their carbines as the females were borne off...

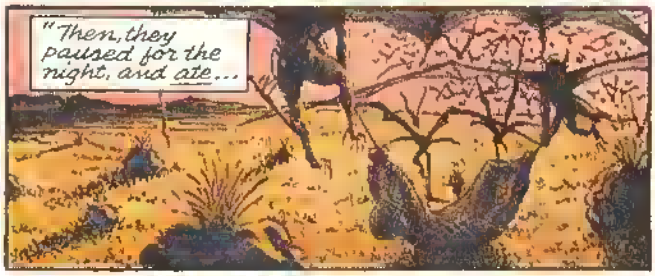


...preferring to risk killing the women, rather than let them be carried off to an unknown fate.

"At last, the deafening thunder of the devouring flames still in my ears, my captors whirled me away as well from the reeking city.

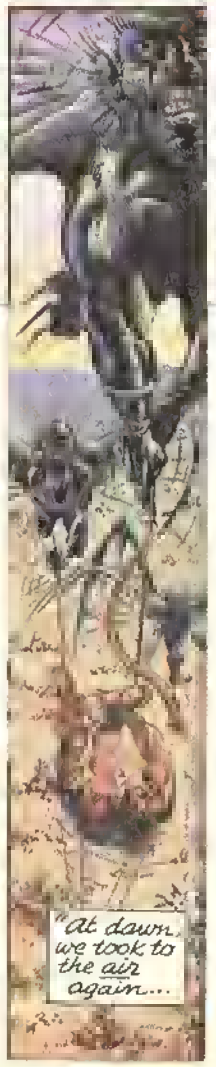

"There must have been fully ten thousand of them.
"I was in the midst of the band, which flew southward at a terrible speed in wedge-shaped formation.

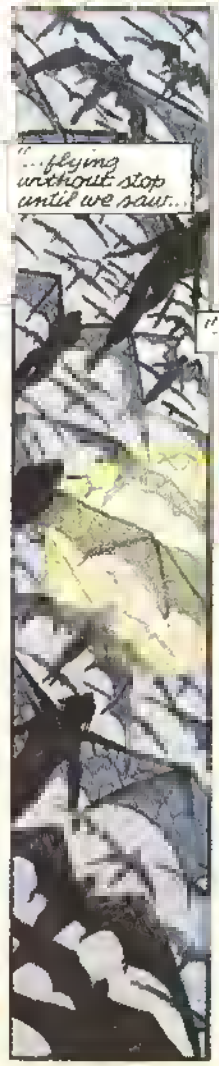
"Many of the Yagas bore women, with an ease that spoke of incredible wing-power, until the sun left the sky.


"Then, they paused for the night, and ate...

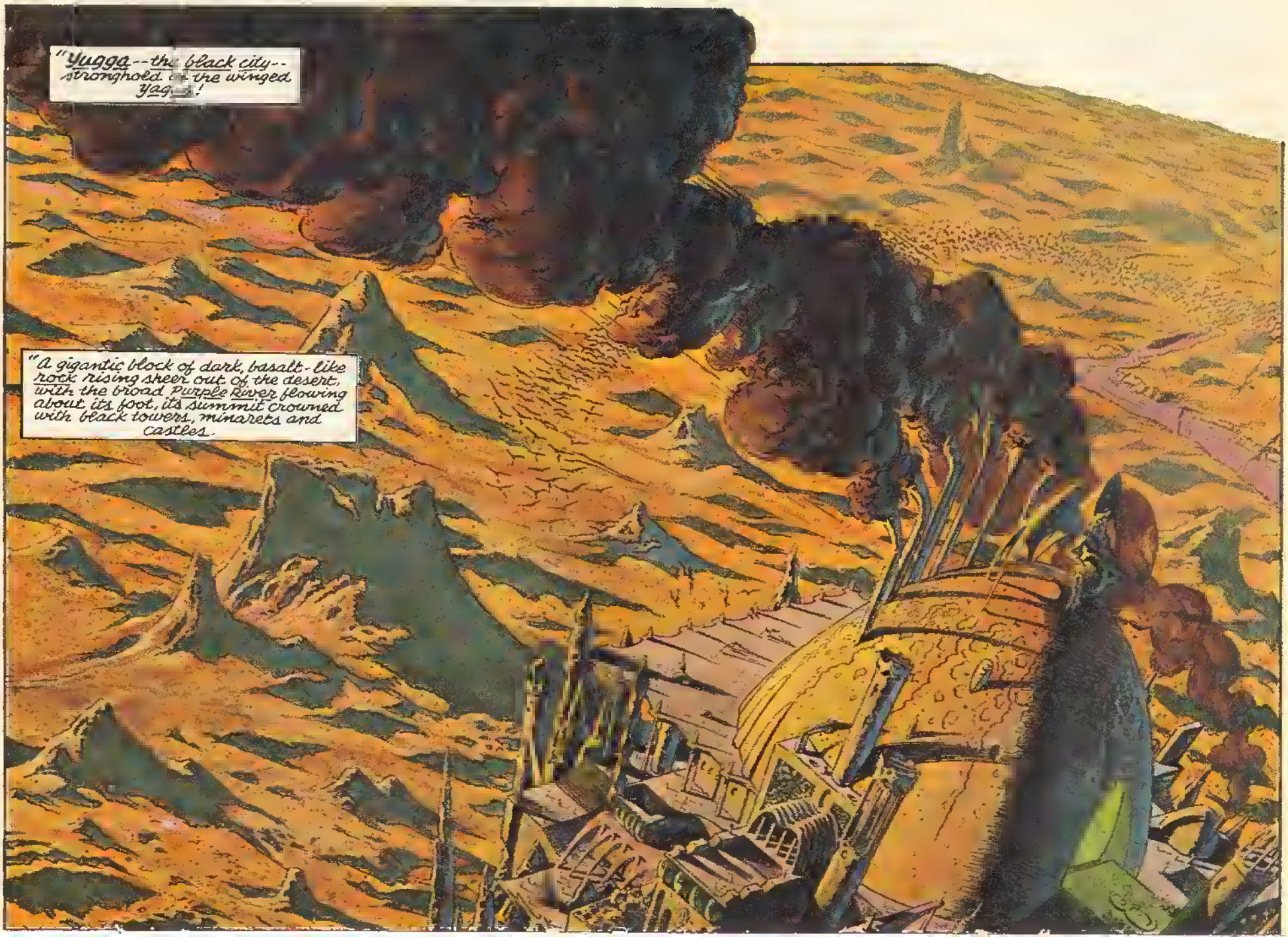
"...and their food was some of their miserable captives!

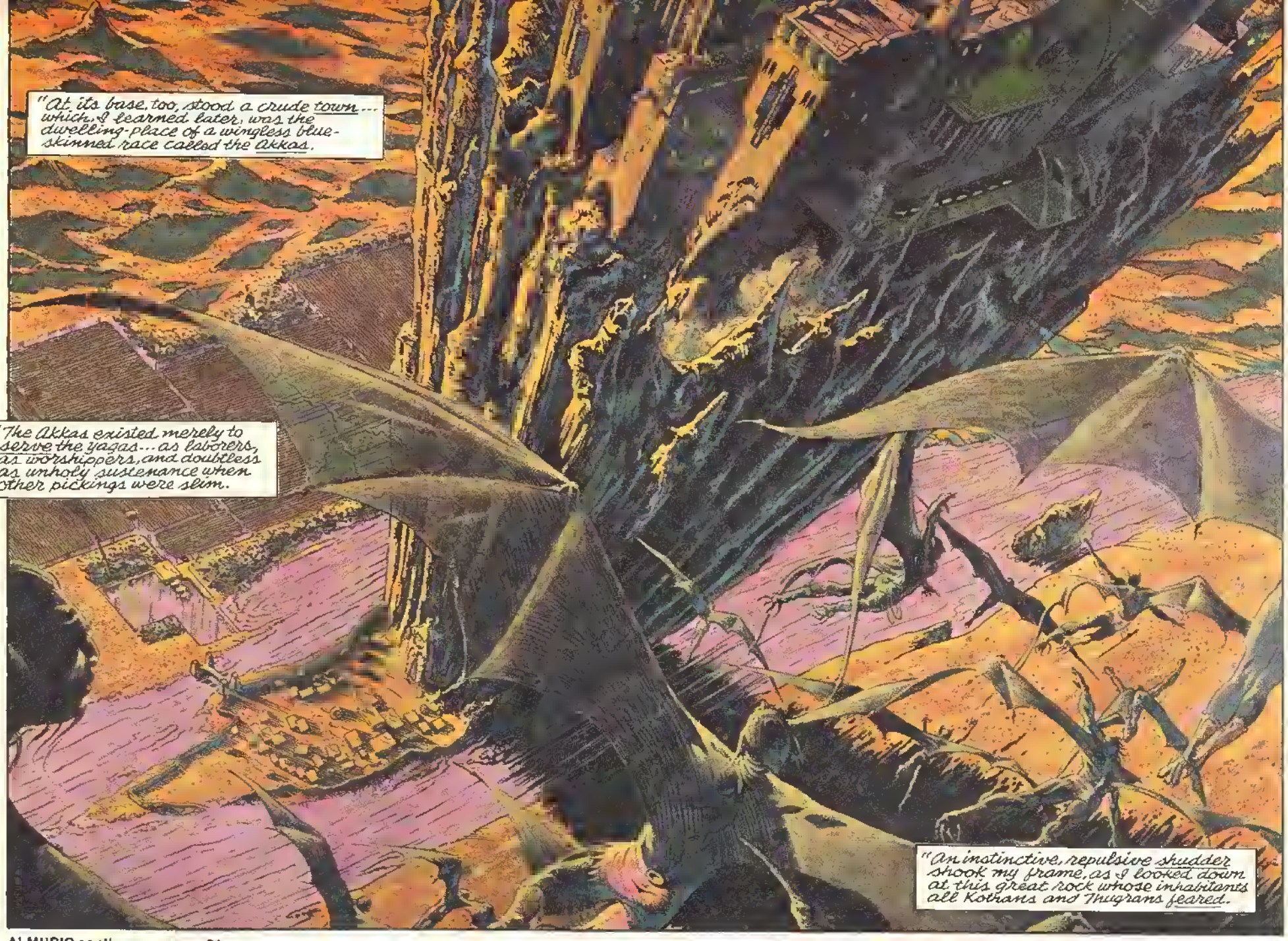
"Afterward, the gorged demons lay about their fires in slumber.
"Had Altha perished this night, I wondered?


"At dawn, we took to the air again...


"...flying without stop until we saw...

"...Yugga!

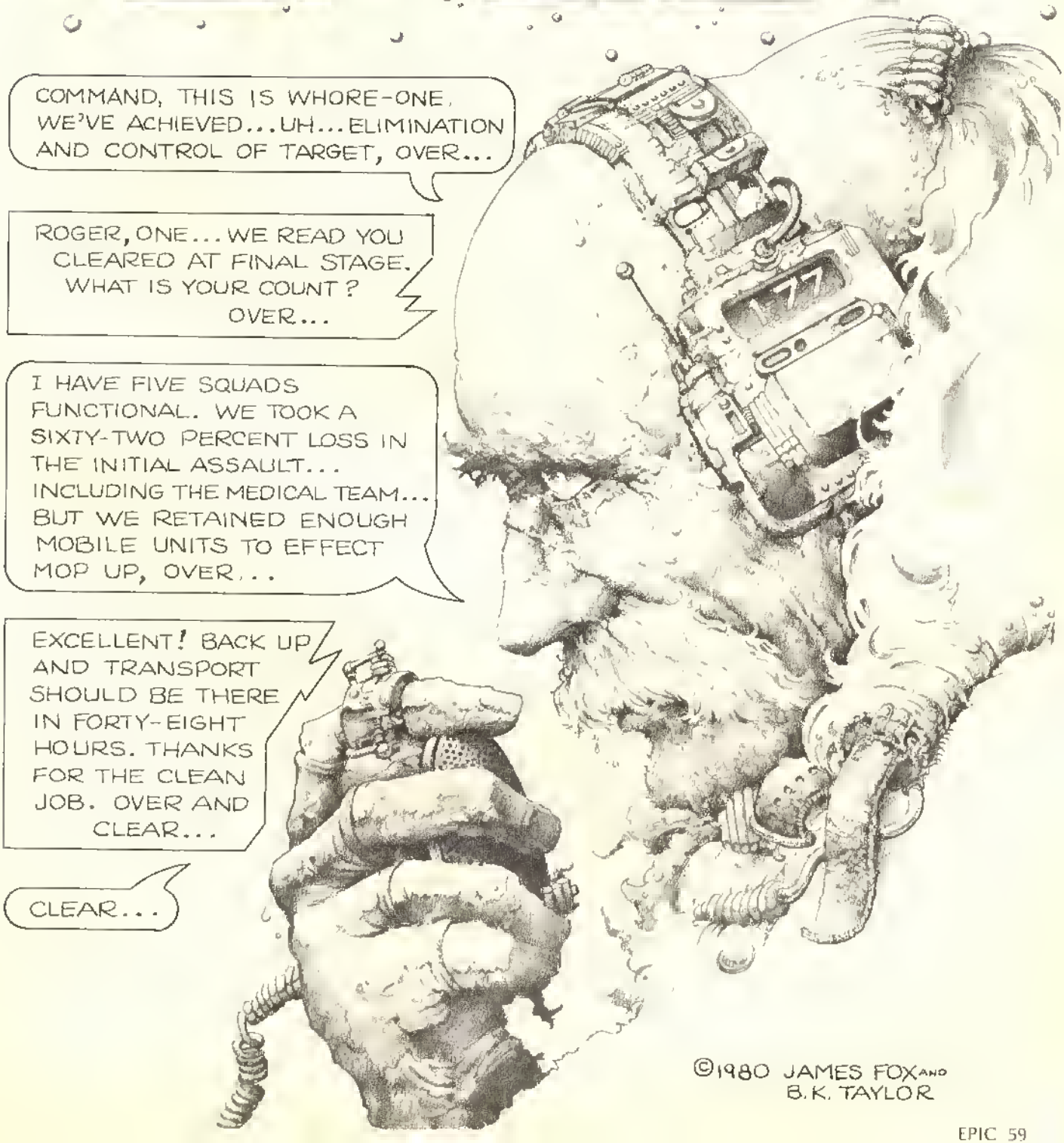

"Yugga--the black city--stronghold of the winged yagas!
"A gigantic block of dark, basalt-like rock rising sheer out of the desert, with the broad Purple River flowing about its foot, its summit crowned with black towers, minarets and castles.

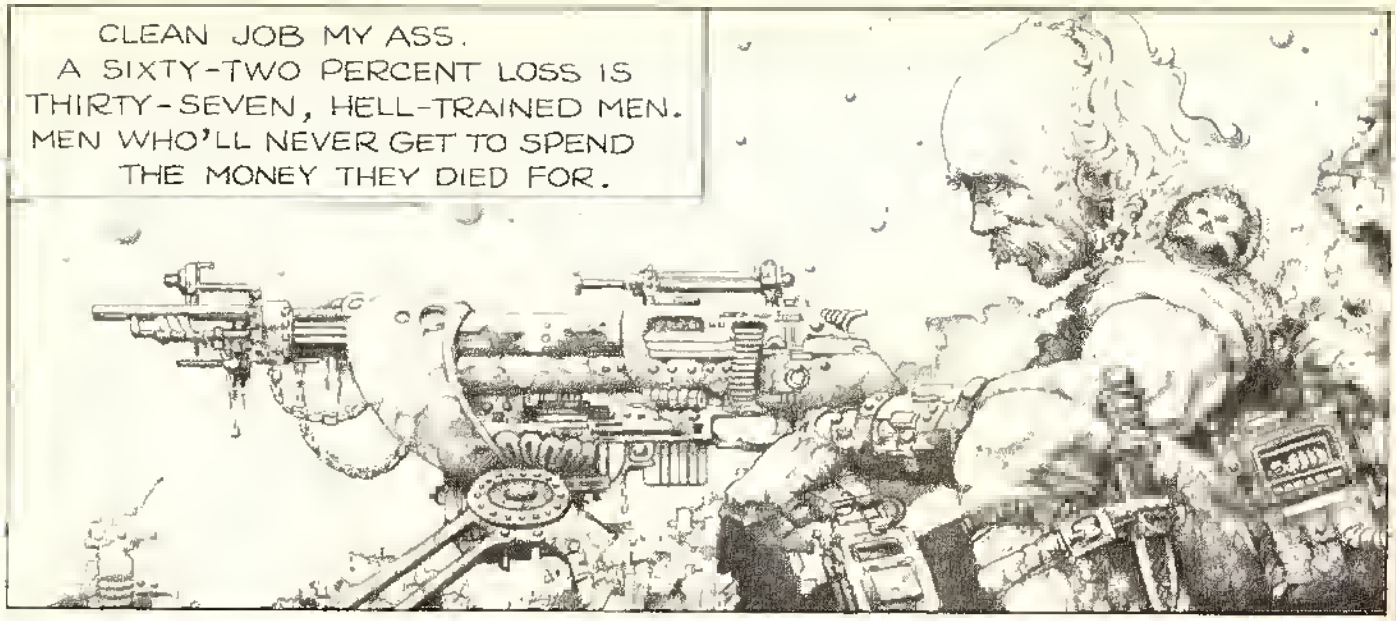


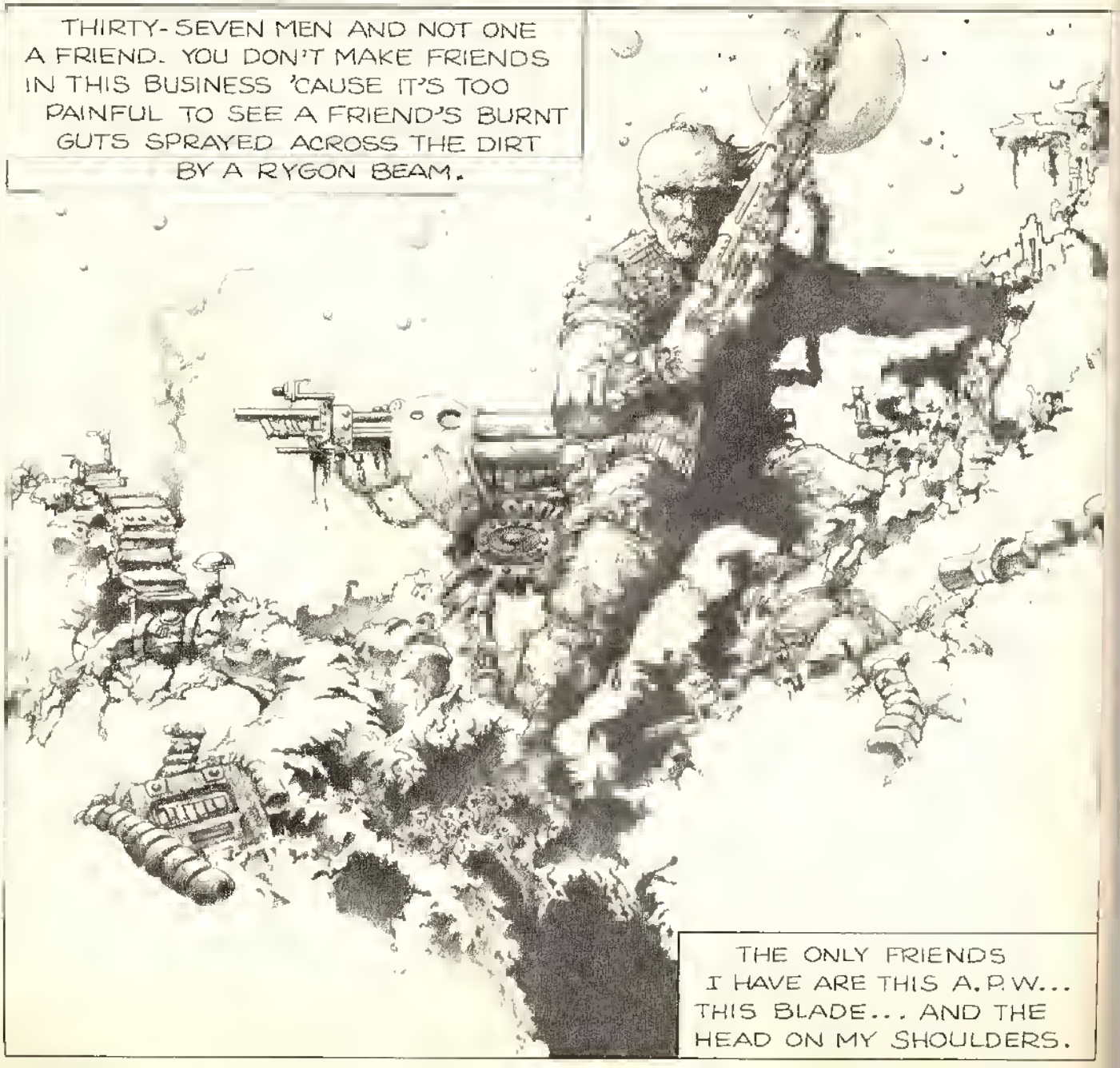
AL MURIC continues on page 91

ELEPHANT GRASS

RETRO SPECT


COMMAND, THIS IS WHORE-ONE. WE'VE ACHIEVED...UH...ELIMINATION AND CONTROL OF TARGET, OVER...
ROGER, ONE... WE READ YOU CLEARED AT FINAL STAGE. WHAT IS YOUR COUNT? OVER...
I HAVE FIVE SQUADS FUNCTIONAL. WE TOOK A SIXTY-TWO PERCENT LOSS IN THE INITIAL ASSAULT... INCLUDING THE MEDICAL TEAM... BUT WE RETAINED ENOUGH MOBILE UNITS TO EFFECT MOP UP, OVER...
EXCELLENT! BACK UP AND TRANSPORT SHOULD BE THERE IN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS. THANKS FOR THE CLEAN JOB. OVER AND CLEAR...
CLEAR...
©1980 JAMES FOX AND B.K. TAYLOR


CLEAN JOB MY ASS. A SIXTY-TWO PERCENT LOSS IS THIRTY-SEVEN, HELL-TRAINED MEN. MEN WHO'LL NEVER GET TO SPEND THE MONEY THEY DIED FOR.


THIRTY-SEVEN MEN AND NOT ONE A FRIEND. YOU DON'T MAKE FRIENDS IN THIS BUSINESS 'CAUSE IT'S TOO PAINFUL TO SEE A FRIEND'S BURNT GUTS SPRAYED ACROSS THE DIRT BY A RYGON BEAM.
THE ONLY FRIENDS I HAVE ARE THIS A.P.W... THIS BLADE... AND THE HEAD ON MY SHOULDERS.

I REMEMBER, I WAS EIGHTEEN AND STILL WET BEHIND THE EARS WHEN WE TOOK THE DOMES ON BODA-KU AND OVERTHREW THEIR MONARCH. HOW GOOD THE WOMEN AND DRINK TASTED THEN. AND THE BLOOD. EVEN THE SALTY TASTE OF BLOOD WAS SOMEHOW SWEET.

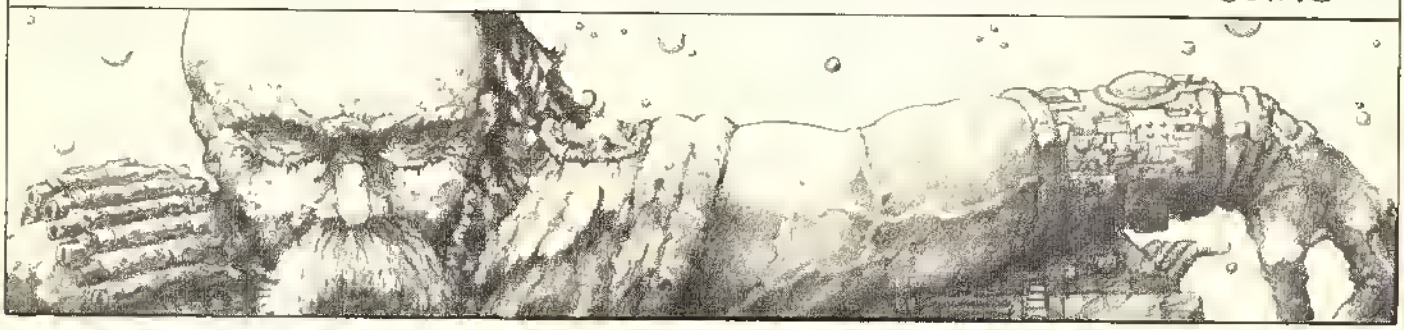
NOW IT MAKES ME WANT TO PUKE...

ONCE THEY TRIED TO IMPERSONALISE WAR BY REPLACING US WITH QUINTREX SYSTEM ROBOTS BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE THAT INSTINCT FOR THE KILL THAT MAN HAS WHEN THE SITUATION DEMANDS IT.

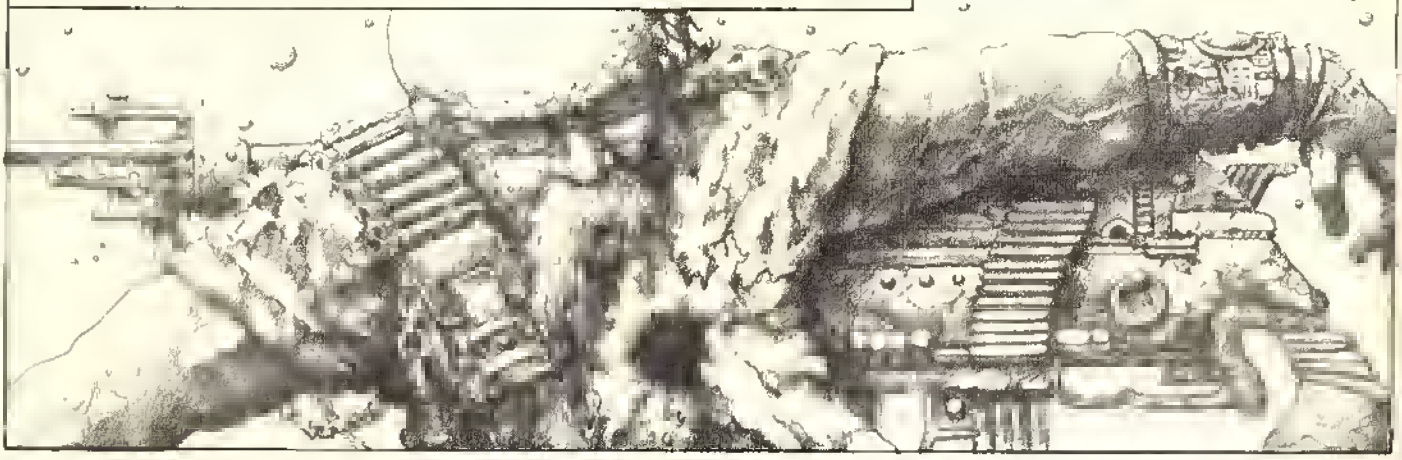
I LOST MY EAR IN A HAND-TO-HAND WITH TWO CYRA REBELS WHEN WE INFILTRATED THEIR QUADRANT DURING THE GOLD WARS. NOW THOSE BASTARDS COULD FIGHT.

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG IDEALIST, I FOUGHT FOR PRINCIPLES ALONE. HA... NOT ANYMORE!

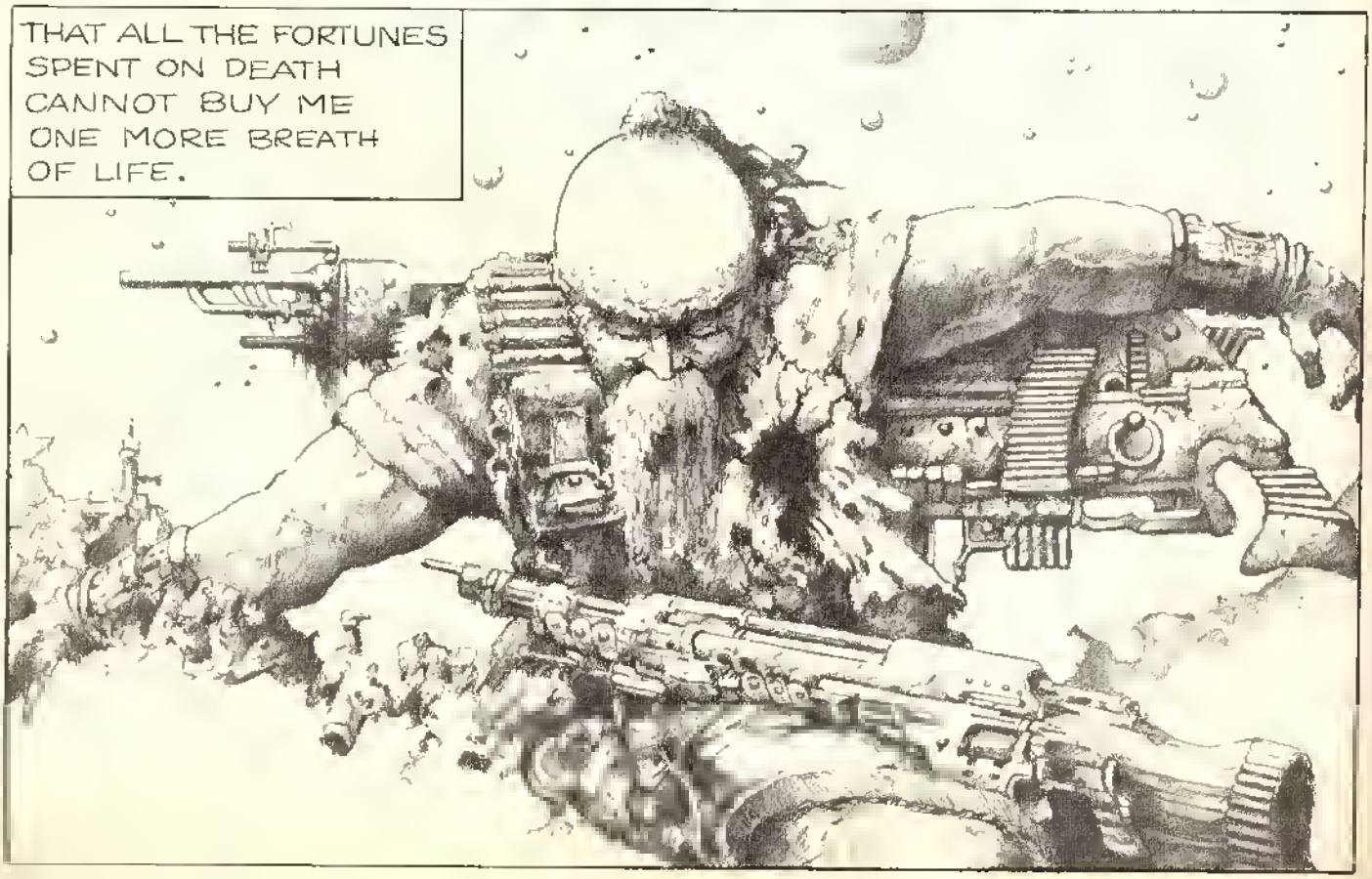
THEY SIT IN THEIR HALLOWED HALLS OF GOVERNMENT AND TALK OF RIGHTEOUS CAUSES BUT IN THE WHITE HEAT OF COMBAT, GOOD AND BAD, RIGHT AND WRONG MELT AWAY. ONLY THE MONEY KEEPS YOU GOING.

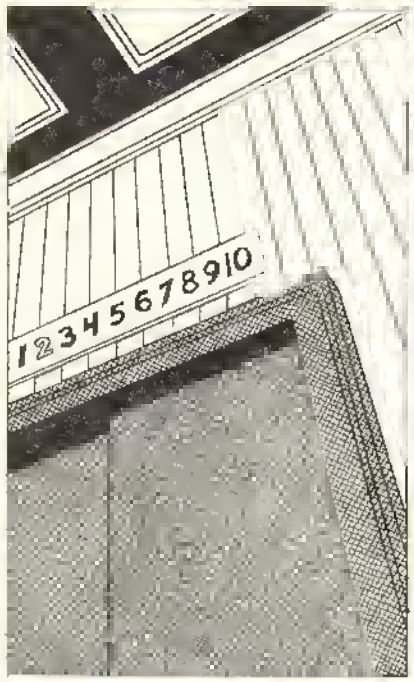


YET NOW, FOR ME, THE TIDE HAS TURNED AND THE ONE GRIM REALITY OF THIS PROFESSION SEALS MY FATE...



THAT ALL THE FORTUNES SPENT ON DEATH CANNOT BUY ME ONE MORE BREATH OF LIFE.




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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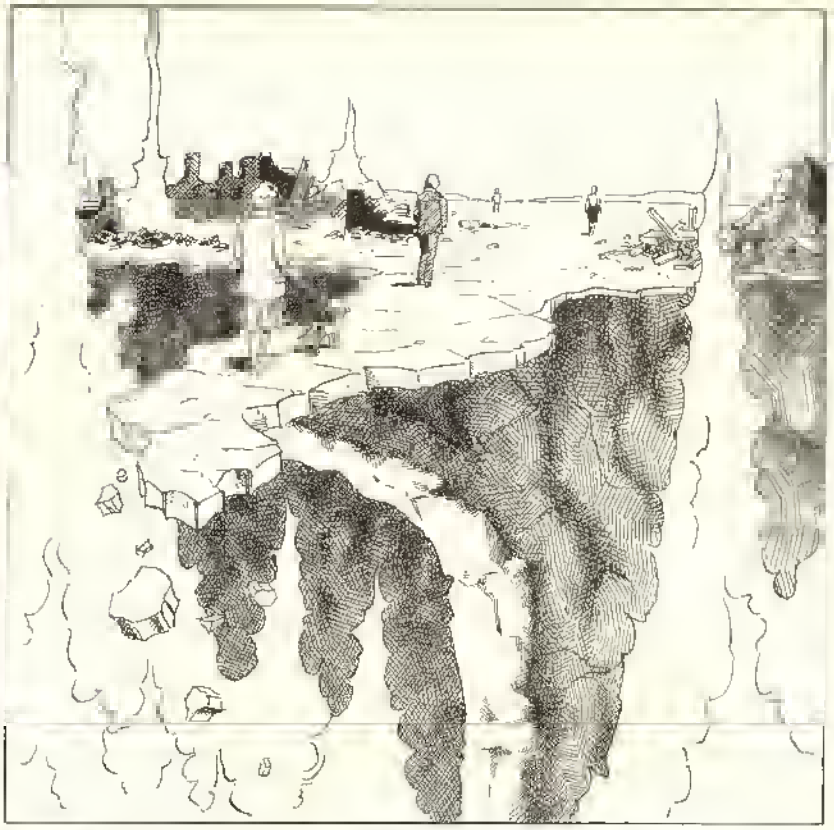
SURVIVORS

COHEN'S ANTIQUES
WEISE'S BOOK SHOP

116
THANKS TO TOM CONROY

U.S. MAIL



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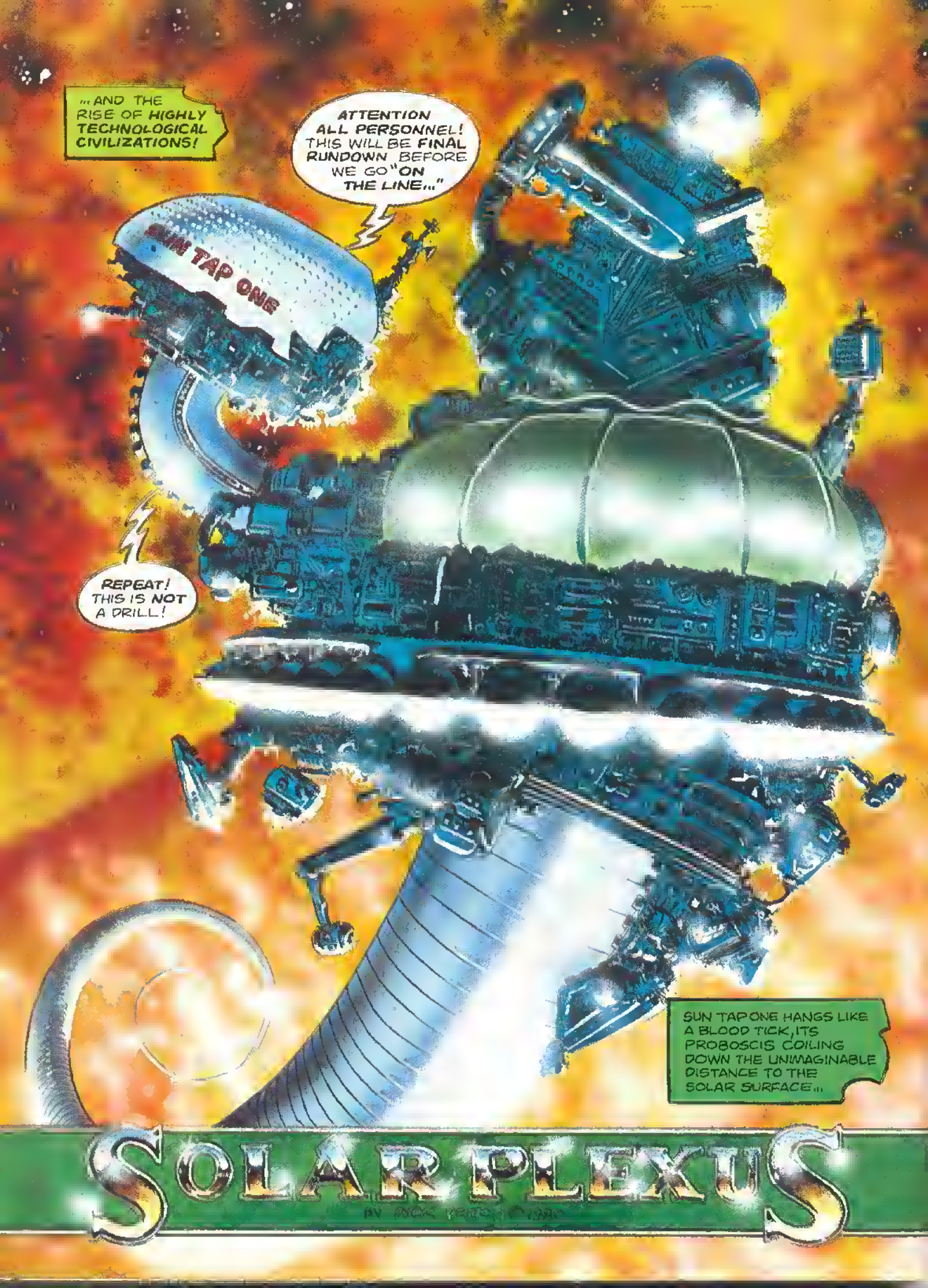
CONSIDER IF YOU WILL... THE UNIVERSE!
...A GLISTENING FABRIC OF TIME AND SPACE WOVEN WITH STARS...
STARS! CRUCIBLES OF THE HEAVENS... PULSING MAJESTICALLY IN THE FIRMAMENT...
STARS ARE ALIVE, YOU KNOW...
YES. ALIVE AND AWARE... AND DANCING...
THE DANCE HAS GONE ON SINCE THE INITIAL MOMENT OF CREATION...
AND NO STAR HAS EVER LOST A STEP OR MISSED A BEAT...
THE DANCE HAS MADE POSSIBLE THE EMERGENCE OF LIFE FORMS ON THE PLANETS...


...AND THE RISE OF HIGHLY TECHNOLOGICAL CIVILIZATIONS!
ATTENTION ALL PERSONNEL! THIS WILL BE FINAL RUNDOWN BEFORE WE GO "ON THE LINE..."
SUN TAP ONE
REPEAT! THIS IS NOT A DRILL!
SUN TAP ONE HANGS LIKE A BLOOD TICK, ITS PROBOSCIS COILING DOWN THE UNIMAGINABLE DISTANCE TO THE SOLAR SURFACE...
SOLAR PLEXUS
BY NICK

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT ON X-RAY, JIM?
THEY HAD TO STRIP-MINE ALL OF MARS TO BUILD THE THING...
HOLDING STEADY AT FORTY TRILLION REMS, DOCTOR STAPLETON!
GOOD. SURFACE TEMPERATURE, TAMMY?
TWICE, THE MONETARY SYSTEM OF EARTH HAD COLLAPSED UNDER ITS STAGGERING COST...
CHROMOSPHERE READS AT 6,000°, AND PHOTOSPHERE 6,800°, DOC.
IS THE HYDROSTATIC EQUILIBRIUM RUNNING ALL RIGHT, BILL?
LOOKS FINE, FROM HERE.
GREAT! ANY UNUSUAL SUNSPOT ACTIVITY, WADE?
A GLOBAL WAR HAD BEEN FOUGHT TO DETERMINE OWNERSHIP...
ALL AT NORMAL LEVELS, DOCTOR.
MANKIND'S ULTIMATE ACHIEVEMENT! A MACHINE TO DRAW OFF THE PLASMIC INTERIOR OF A STAR!
FINE.
ALL SET, MONA?
THE INCALCULABLE AMOUNTS OF ENERGY AVAILABLE WOULD SERVE TO ALTER THE CLIMATES OF THE OUTER PLANETS...
SATURN, JUPITER, URANUS, NEPTUNE, --ALL POTENTIALLY HABITABLE AND EXPLOITABLE WITH POWER TORN FROM THE BELLY OF THE SUN...
READY ON MASTER SWITCH, DOCTOR STAPLETON...
NEEDLESS TO SAY, ITS ALSO THE ULTIMATE WEAPON...

DOCTOR STAPLETON IS WELL WITH THE SUN...
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN - WE STAND POISED AT THE GREATEST MOMENT IN HUMAN HISTORY!
BORN WITH AN AFFINITY FOR THE SUN... HE CAN FEEL IT!
OF COURSE HE NEVER REALIZED HOW MUCH, UNTIL THE FEELING STOPPED...
THAT WAS DURING THE TOTAL ECLIPSE OF 1979 WHEN STAPLETON EXPERIENCED SOMETHING SINGULAR...
HE "DIED"...
WITH THE HARNESSING OF THE SUN, THE CHILDREN OF EARTH BECOME THE MASTERS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM!
...AS THE SUN EMERGED FROM BEHIND ITS LUNAR SHADE, LIFE RETURNED TO STAPLETON.
MANKIND IS READY TO CLAIM ITS BIRTHRIGHT!
...HE AROSE IN AWE! HIS BODY KNEW -- SOMEHOW - SOMEWAY - HE WAS LINKED TO THE THERMONUCLEAR INFERNO THAT SUSTAINS US ALL!
OF WHAT HE SAW DURING HIS "DEMISE" HE NEVER SPOKE, BUT THE STUDY OF THE SUN BECAME A LIFE LONG OBSESSION...
...AT AN EARLY AGE HE STARTLED THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WITH HIS INSIGHTS INTO THE NATURE OF OUR STELLAR HOST...
LET 'ER RIP!
...AND WHEN SUN TAP ONE, THE GREATEST SOLAR PROJECT OF ALL TIME, CAME ALONG, IT WAS STAPLETON WHO WAS CHOSEN TO DIRECT IT...
STAPLETON WHOSE HAND THROWS THE MASTER SWITCH...
...STAPLETON WHO SPENT TEN YEARS SUPERVISING CONSTRUCTION...

THE SOLAR TAP IS **50,000 KILOMETERS** LONG...

...EXTENDING THROUGH THE BLISTERING SURFACE... PENETRATING **DEEP** INTO THE SUN'S **MEATY GUTS...**

...WITH A STEADY MECHANICAL DRAW IT BEGINS TO SUCK OUT THE SOLAR CORE LIKE SO MUCH SPAGHETTI...

...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ALL CREATION, ...A STAR FEELS-- **PAIN!**

ALL SYSTEM'S GREEN, DOC! SHE'S RUNNING LIKE A CLOCK!

WOW--LOOK AT THOSE ENERGY LEVELS!

UNNGH! PAIN RIPPING THROUGH ME LIKE A HOT DRILL PRESS!

...AND WHAT THE GAUGES OF SUN TAP ONE READ AS **POWER,** THE STAR FEELS AS A **GNAWING, PIERCING ACHE!**

...THE EXCRUCIATING AGONY OF ITS LIFE PLASMA BEING PUMPED OUT!!

OWWW! NOT A HEART ATTACK-- **SOMETHING WORSE!**

SUNSPOT ACTIVITY JUST WENT **WILD!**

THIS IS GONNA' SCREW UP **EVERYTHING!**

FLARE ALERT! FLARE ALERT!

ALL PERSONNEL TO FLARE STATIONS!

WHAT'S THE ORDER DOC...?

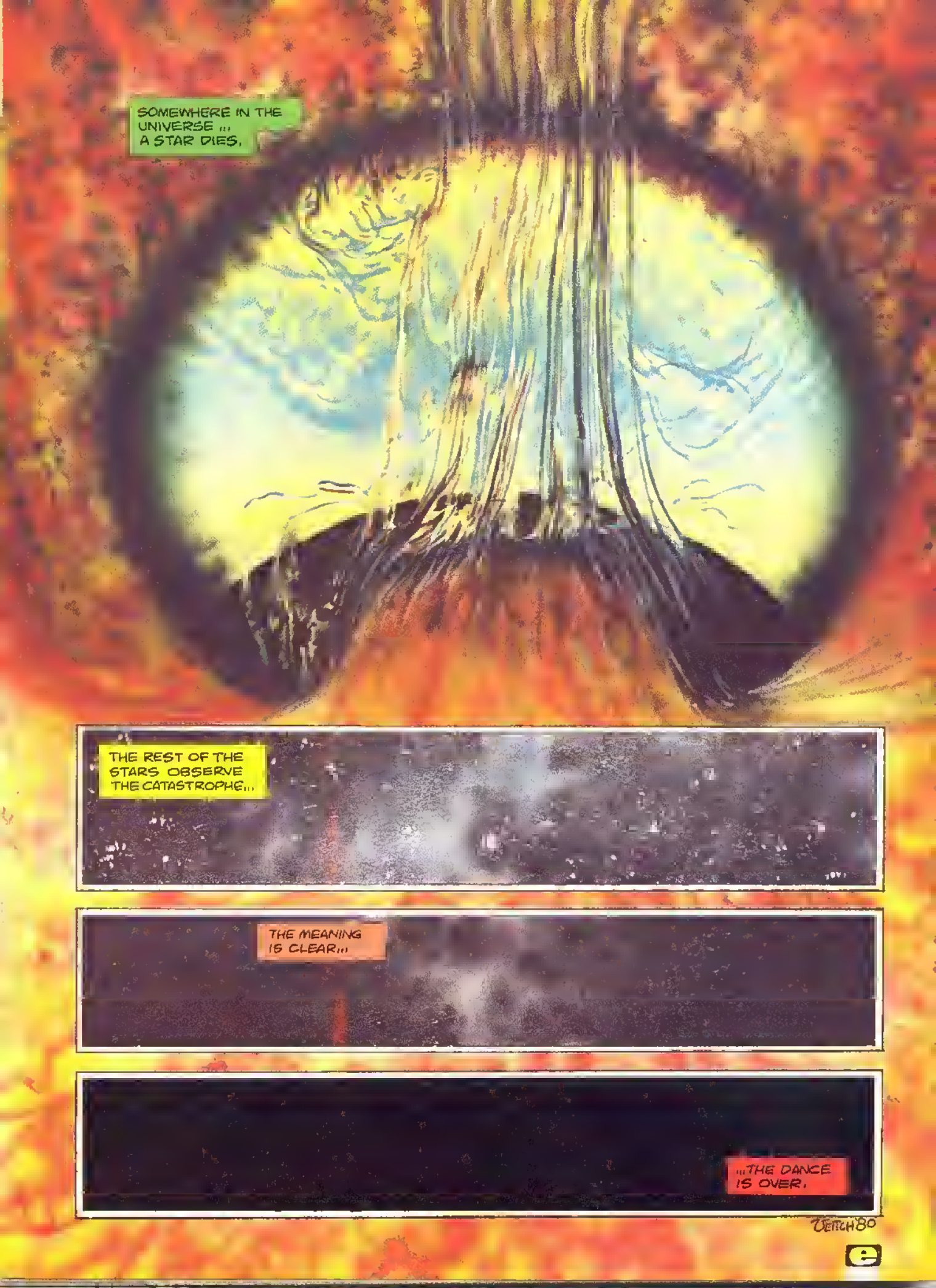
DOC?

AARRGH! OF COURSE! ITS THE SUN--I'M **RESPONDING TO THE SUN!**

SHUT IT DOWN! SHUT IT DOWN!!

CAN'T, SIR--THE SOLAR FLARE-UPS ARE PLAYING HELL WITH THE CIRCUITRY...
IT'LL TAKE AT LEAST AN HOUR TO SHUT DOWN MANUALLY!
...AND THE STAR SCREAMS!
...UNTIL, LIKE A MADDENED ANIMAL...
HOLY MOTHER OF GOD...
...THE SUN IS... MOVING!
...IT RUNS!
...IN ITS TORMENT, THE DANCE IS FORGOTTEN!

THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING!
HYDROSTATIC EQUILIBRIUM IS SHOT--!
IF THIS KEEPS UP SHE GOES NOVA IN FIFTEEN SECONDS!
DOCTOR STAPLETON-- WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENING!?
≥R-RETCH≤ S-S-STAR-- WAS... A-A-A-ALIVE! ≥KAAAAAKK≤ W-W-W-WE...
...KILLED IT.
THREE SECONDS TO NOVA...


SOMEWHERE IN THE UNIVERSE ... A STAR DIES.
THE REST OF THE STARS OBSERVE THE CATASTROPHE...
THE MEANING IS CLEAR...
...THE DANCE IS OVER.
VEITCH 80

SLEEPING DOGS

Story by
Harlan Ellison

Illustrated by
Ken Steacy

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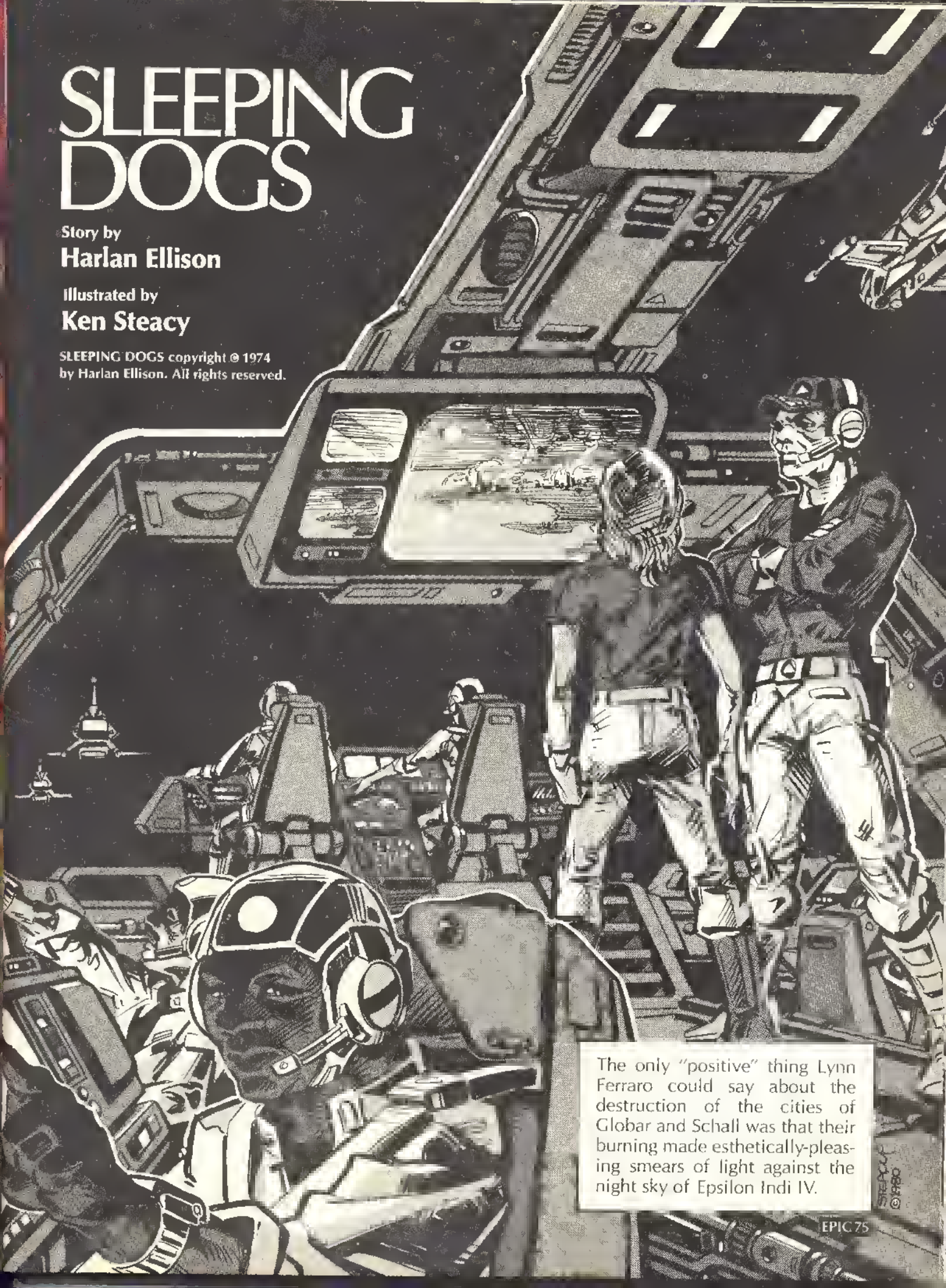
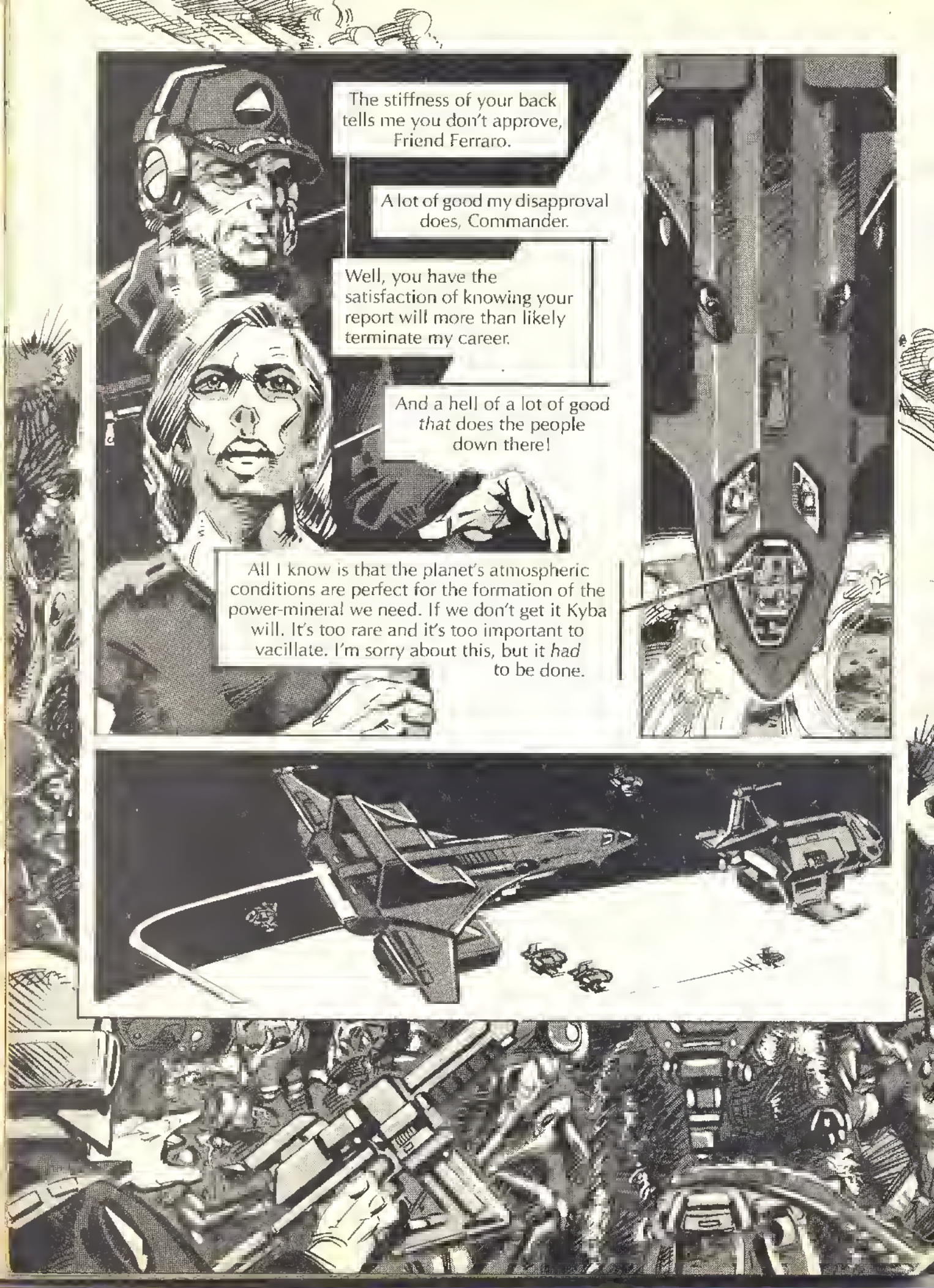


The only "positive" thing Lynn Ferraro could say about the destruction of the cities of Globar and Schall was that their burning made esthetically-pleasing smears of light against the night sky of Epsilon Indi IV.


The stiffness of your back tells me you don't approve, Friend Ferraro.
A lot of good my disapproval does, Commander.
Well, you have the satisfaction of knowing your report will more than likely terminate my career.
And a hell of a lot of good *that* does the people down there!
All I know is that the planet's atmospheric conditions are perfect for the formation of the power-mineral we need. If we don't get it Kyba will. It's too rare and it's too important to vacillate. I'm sorry about this, but it *had* to be done.

She was an *Amicus Hostis*, a Friend of the Enemy, placed on board the Terran dreadnought *Descartes* in this, the forty-first year of the Earth-Kyba War, to attempt *any kind* of rapprochement with the Kyben, should a situation present itself in which they would do other than kill or be killed. And when it became clear that this lunatic, this butcher, this Commander Julian Drabix was determined to take the planet at any cost...when it became clear her command powers would be ignored by him, she had filed a report with Terran Central. But it would take time to be studied, time for a report–judgment, time for instructions to be fired back to the *Descartes*. Drabix had not waited. Contravening the authority of the *Amicus*, he had unleashed the full firepower of the Dreadnought. Globar and Schall burned like Sodom & Gomorrah.

But unlike those hellholes of an ancient religion, no one knew if the residents of Globar and Schall were good, or evil, or merely frightened natives of a world caught in the middle of an interstellar war that seemed destined *never* to end.

She despised him. She despised everything about him, but this blind servitude to Cause was the most loathsome aspect of his character. Who would speak the elegy for the thousands, perhaps millions, who now burned among the stones of the twin cities?

When the conflagration died, and the rubble cooled, Commander Drabix and Friend Ferraro went to the surface. To murmur among the ashes.

Command post had been set up on the island the natives called Stand of Light. Drabix had ordered his recon teams to scour the planet and bring in a wide sample of prisoners. Now they stood in ragged ranks up and down the beach as far as Lynn Ferraro could see.

I can't believe this!

What he found difficult to believe was the diversity of races represented in the population sample the recon ships had brought in. Yet nowhere in the thousands of trembling and cursing prisoners could be seen even one single golden-skinned tentacle-fingered Kyban. Of the expeditionary force sent from far Kyba to hold this crossroads planet, not one survivor remained. They had all, to the last defender, committed suicide.

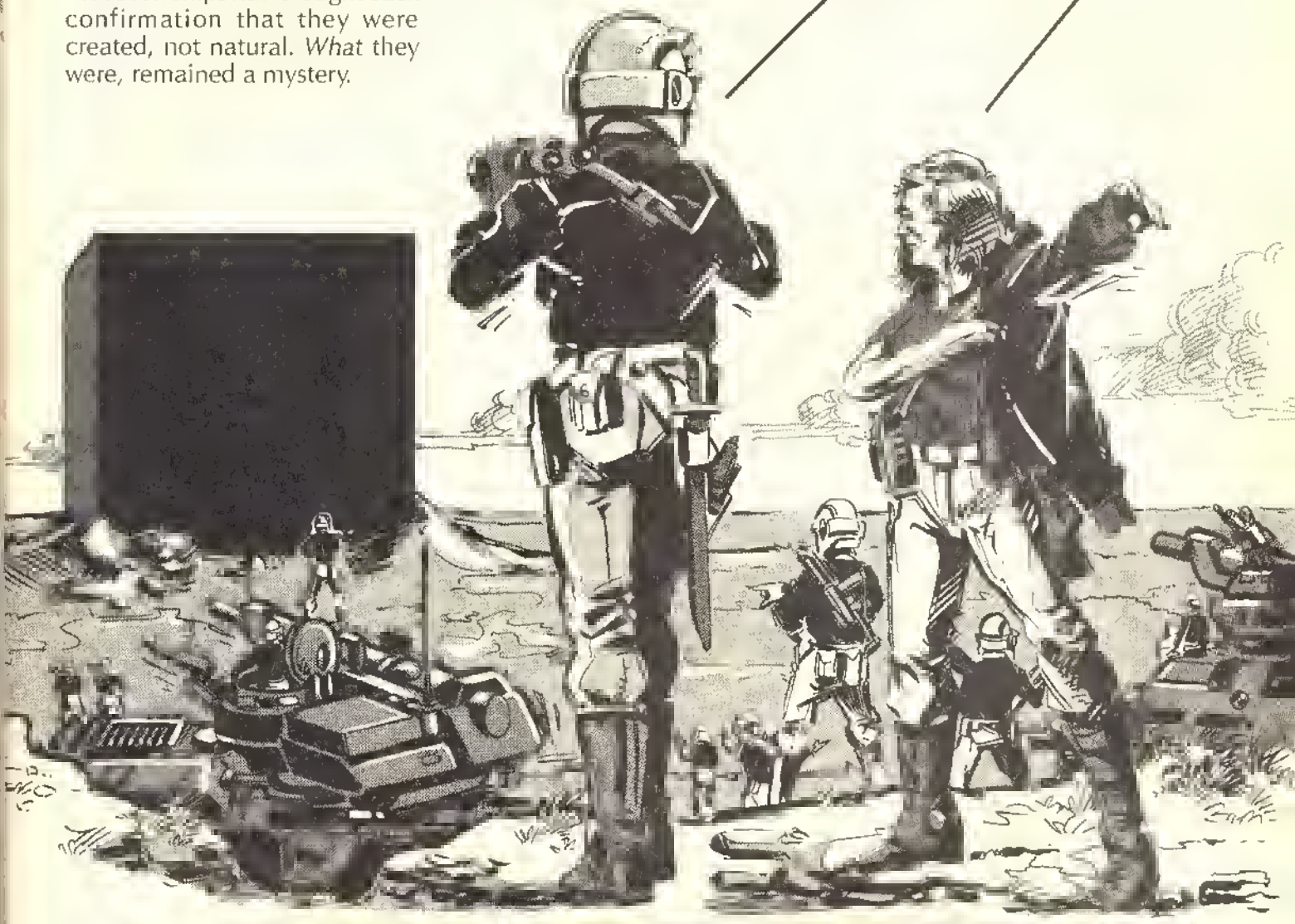
Friend Ferraro?
Yes, I'm sorry, what is it, Mr. Lalwani?
The Commander would like to see you, on the main continent. He's decided to take the forts.
What does he want with me? Has there been a reply from Central or does he simply want an audience?
I don't know, Miz. He ordered me to come and find you. I have a recon ship waiting, whenever you're ready.
Thank you, Mr. Lalwani. I'll be along in a few moments.
She sat staring out across the ocean; as always: an observer.

They had charted the positions of the fifty "forts" during the first pass at the planet. Whether they were, in fact, forts was entirely supposition. At first they were thought to be natural rock formations—huge black cubes sunk into the earth of the tiny planet; featureless, ominous, silent—but their careful spacing around the equator made that unlikely. And the recon ships had brought back confirmation that they were created, not natural. *What* they were, remained a mystery.

I wanted you here because I'm still in charge of this operation, and whatever you may think of my actions I still follow orders. You're required to be in attendance, and I want *that* in the report.

It's noted, Commander.

I expected something more from you...a comment. An assessment of military priorities. A plea to spare these cultural treasures. Something...*anything*...to justify your position.



She saw the depth of distaste he held for her. Was it her Amicus status, or herself he feared and despised? Had she been repelled less by his warrior manner, she might have pitied him—*"There are men whom one hates until that moment when one sees, through a chink in their armor, the sight of something nailed down and in torment."*

The validity of my position will insure you *never* go to space again, Commander. If there were more I could do, something immediate and final, I would do it. But I *can't*. Your're in charge here, and the best I can do is record what I think is insane behavior.

His anger flared again, and for a moment she thought he might hit her a second time; and she dropped back into a self-defense position. The first time he had taken her unaware; there would be no second time; she was capable of crippling him.

Let me tell you a thing, *Amicus*, **Friend of the Enemy**! You're a **paid spy** for the enemy, an enemy that's out to **kill** us, **every one of us**, that will stop nowhere short of **total annihilation** of the human race! The Kyben feed off a **hatred** of humankind unknown to any other race in the galaxy...

My threshhold for jingoism is very low, Commander. If you have some information to convey, do so.

Whether this planet has what I think it has, or not, quite clearly it's been a prize for a long time. Long before the war moved into this sector. It's been conquered and reconquered and conquered all over again. There's something here they all wanted.

And you think whatever it is, it's in the fifty forts. Have you spoken to any of the prisoners? Because if you have you'd have learned that whatever lives inside those forts has *permitted* the planet to be conquered. It doesn't *care*, as long as everyone minds their own business.

Go sit down, *Amicus*, the heat's getting to you.

They say even the Kyben were tolerated. I'm warning you, Commander; leave the forts alone.

Fade off, Friend Ferraro. Command means decision and my orders are to secure this planet. Secure doesn't mean fifty impregnable fortresses left untouched. **Mr. Lalwani, tell the ground batteries to commence on signal.**

It's war, Commander. That's your only answer, that it's war?

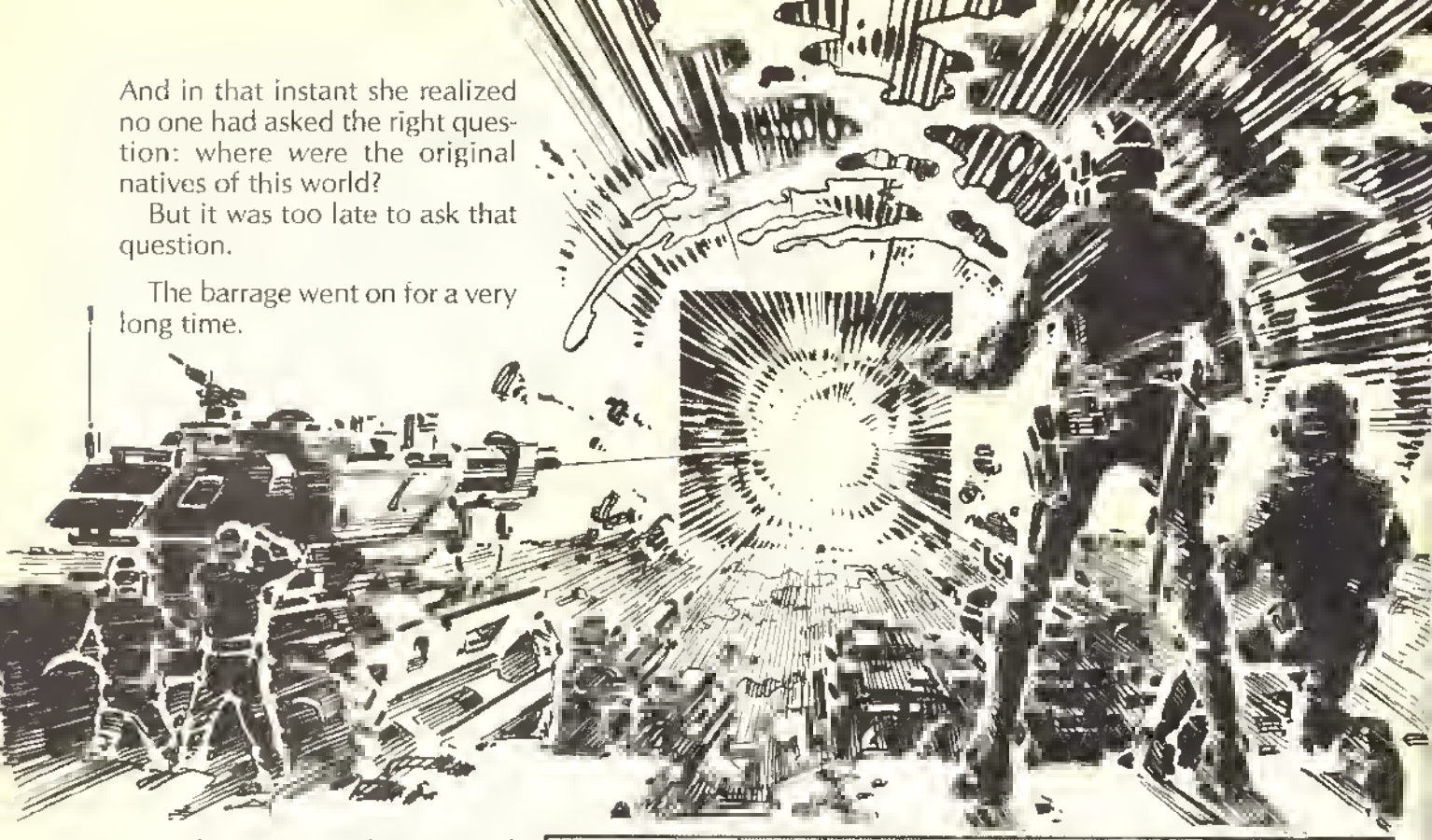
That's right, It's a war to the finish. *Something* has to break the stalemate with the Kyben, and even if I don't see the end of it I'll be satisfied knowing I was the one who broke it. Protect your eyes, Friend. **Commence firing!**

Let them alone!

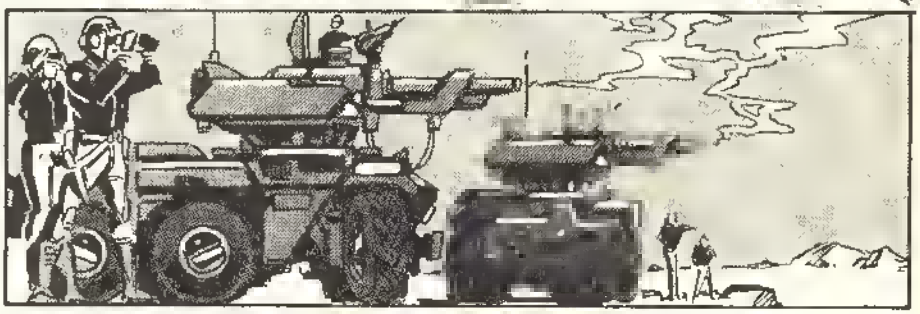
And in that instant she realized no one had asked the right question: where *were* the original natives of this world?

But it was too late to ask that question.

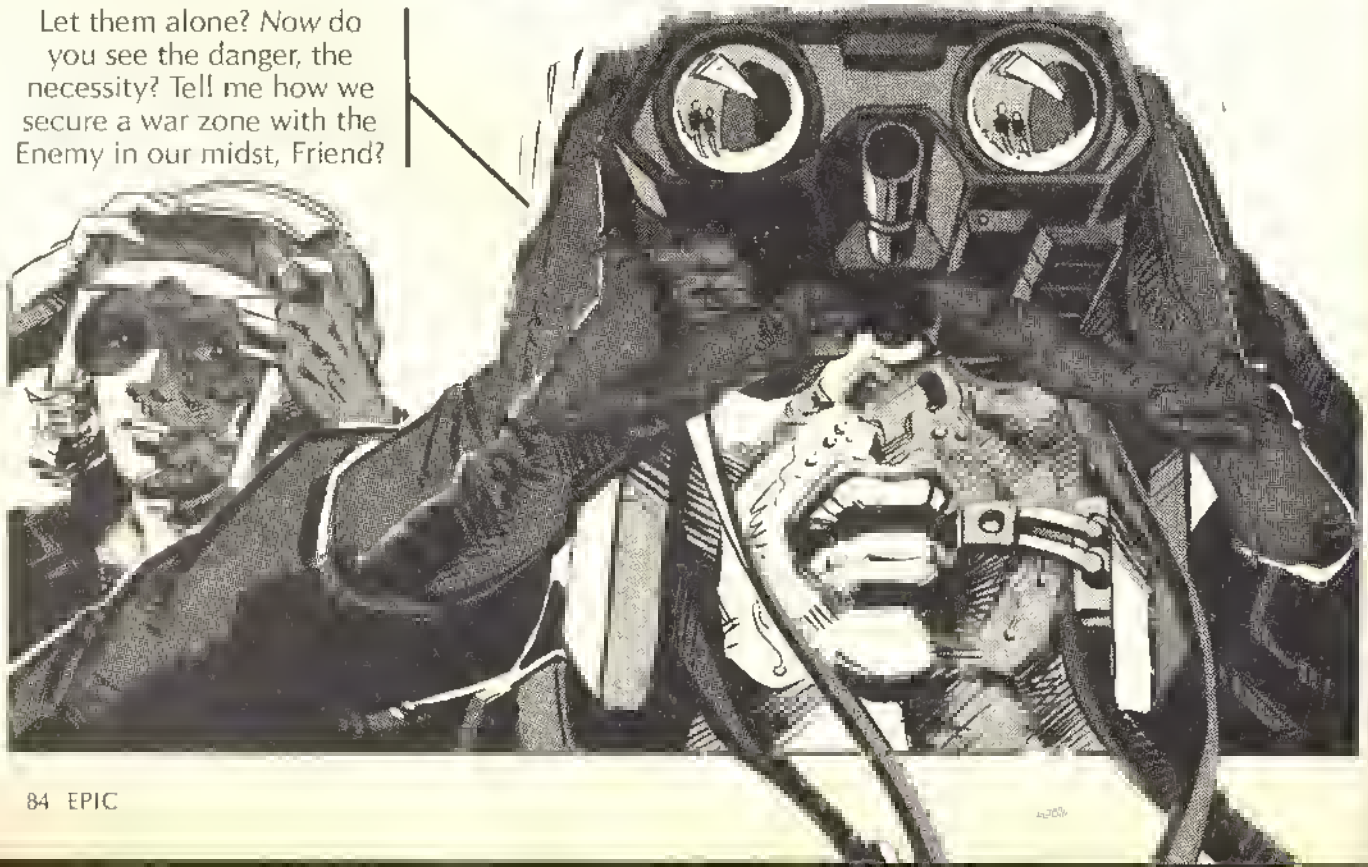
The barrage went on for a very long time.



Later, the reports Drabix received were even more disturbing than the mere presence of the forts: whatever formed those cubes, it was beyond the destructive capabilites of the ground batteries. The barrage had drained their power sources, and still the fort remained unscathed.



Let them alone? *Now* do you see the danger, the necessity? Tell me how we secure a war zone with the Enemy in our midst, Friend?



They *aren't* the enemy!

Leave them alone, eh?

They *want* to be left alone!

Drabix to Descartes: Mr. Kokonen, on signal pour everything you've got into the primary lancets. Hit it dead center. And keep going till you open it up.

On signal, sir.

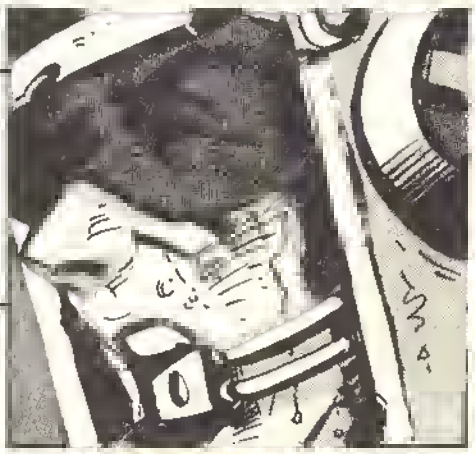
Drabix! Wait for Central to...

Minus three!

Let it alone! Let me try another-

Minus two!

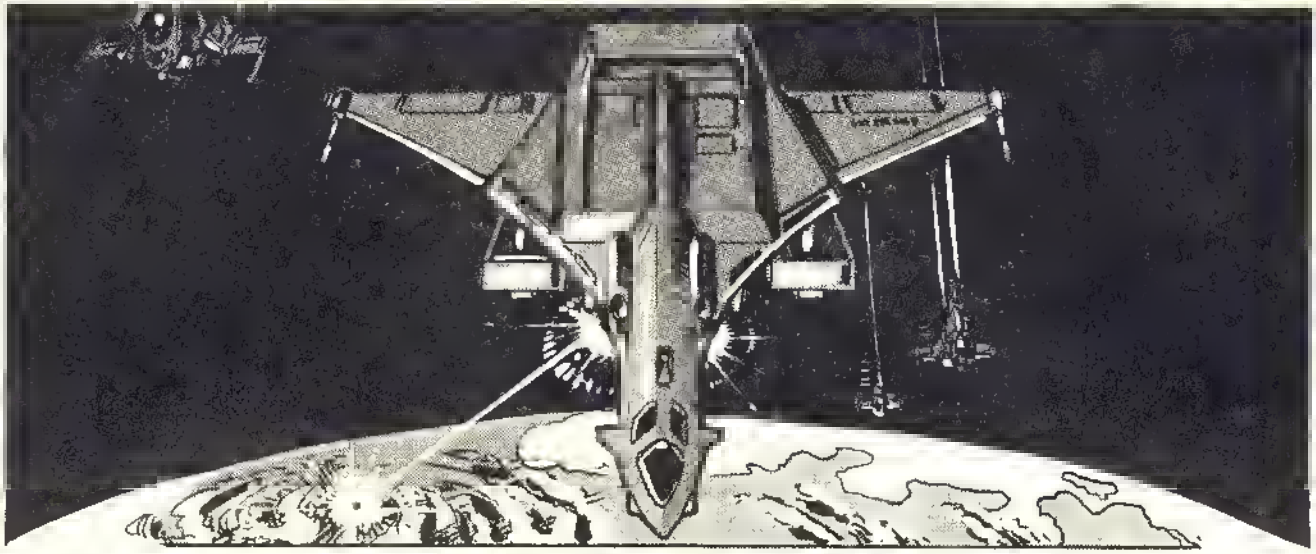
Drabix...stop...

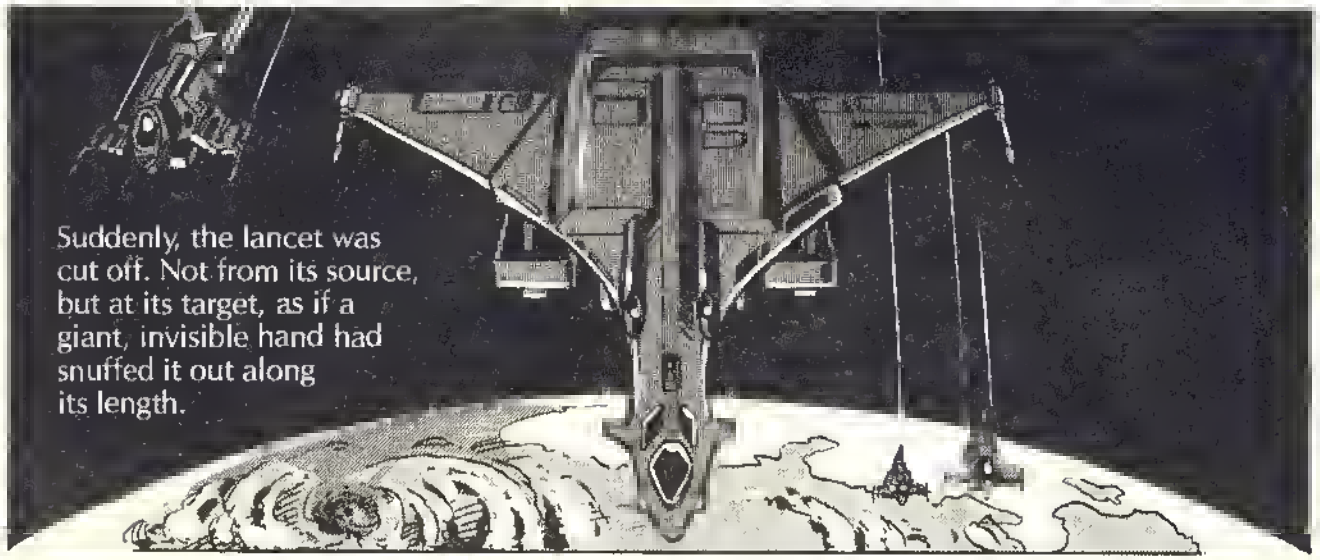


Minus one! Go to Hell, Friend!

You're out of your...

Commence firing!




Suddenly, the lancet was cut off. Not from its source, but at its target, as if a giant, invisible hand had snuffed it out along its length.

A moment later, a new sun lit the sky as the dreadnought *Descartes* was strangled with its own weapon.

Then the cube began to rise from the earth. However much larger it was than what was revealed on the plain, Lynn Ferraro could not begin to estimate. It rose up and up, now no longer a squat cube, becoming a terrifying pillar of featureless black that dominated the sky. Somehow, she knew at forty-nine other locations around the planet the remaining forts were also rising.

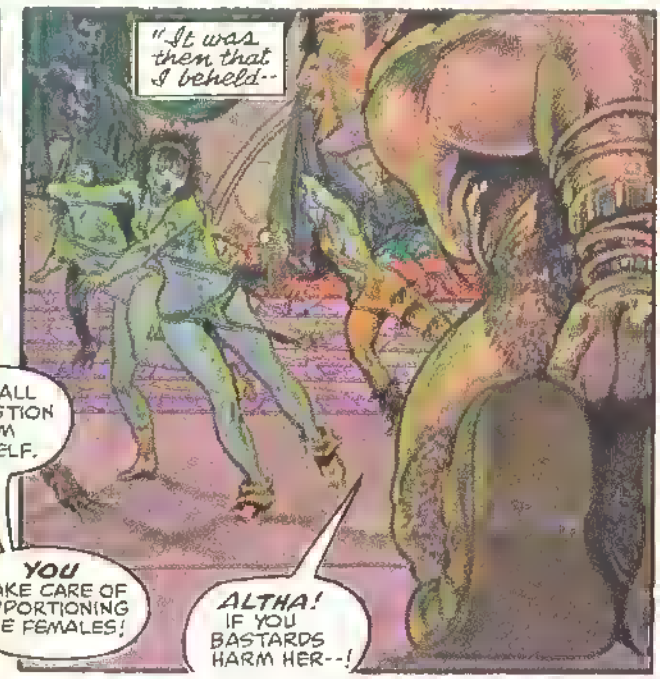
After endless centuries of solitude, whatever lived in those structures was awakening at last.

They had been content to let the races of the galaxy come and go and conquer and be assimilated, as long as they were not severely threatened. They might have allowed humankind to come here and exist, or they might have allowed the Kyben the same freedom. But not both.

The original natives of the planet were taking a hand at last. The stalemate was broken. A third force had entered the war. And whether they would be inimical to Terrans or Kyben, no one could know. It was clear: roused from sleep, the inhabitants of the fifty forts would never consider themselves Friends of the Enemy.

"I had little opportunity to observe, however...
"...as a great portal opened on a corridor wherein a dozen elephants could have walked abreast...
"...and the women and I were herded rudely inside.
O YASMEENA, QUEEN OF THE NIGHT--WE BRING YOU THE FRUITS OF CONQUEST!
"From above, I had seen other Yaga women, but all of them were wingless.
"Queen Yasmeena, however, was both winged--and possessed of the face and form of a goddess, as if she were a soulless statue.
WHO IS THAT BARBARIAN YOU'VE BROUGHT, WHOSE NEAR-HAIRLESS SKIN IS WHITE?
HE IS CLAD LIKE ONE OF THE SAVAGES--YET IS SOMEHOW UNLIKE THEM.

WE FOUND HIM A CAPTIVE AMONG THE THUGRANS, O MISTRESS OF DARKNESS.
I SHALL QUESTION HIM MYSELF.
YOU TAKE CARE OF APPORTIONING THE FEMALES!

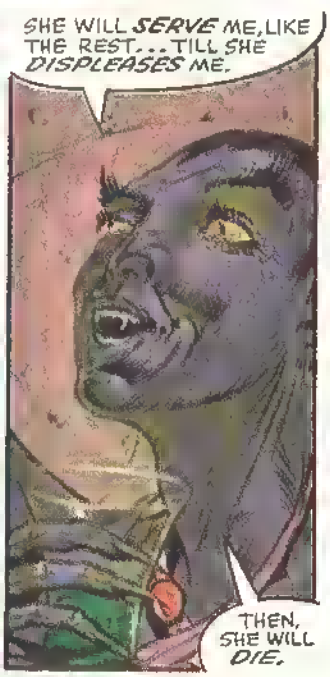

"It was then that I beheld--
ALTHA! IF YOU BASTARDS HARM HER--!

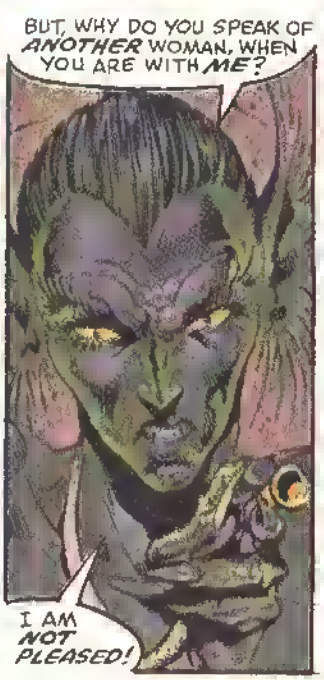
FORGET THE GIRL. WHO ARE YOU--
--WITH EYES THAT BLAZE LIKE BLUE FIRE?

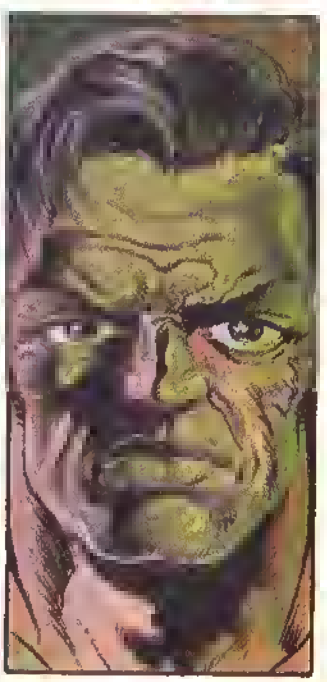
I'LL SPEAK-- BUT YOU'LL THINK I LIE.
I'M ESAU CAIRN, WHOM THE KOTHANS CALL IRON-HAND.
AND I COME FROM ANOTHER WORLD, OF ANOTHER SOLAR SYSTEM!

I BELIEVE YOU...FOR, OF OLD, MEN PASSED FROM STAR TO STAR.
I THINK YOU SHALL LIVE... FOR A WHILE.

WHAT OF ALTHA? WHAT DID YOU DO TO HER?


SHE WILL SERVE ME, LIKE THE REST... TILL SHE DISPLEASES ME.
THEN, SHE WILL DIE.

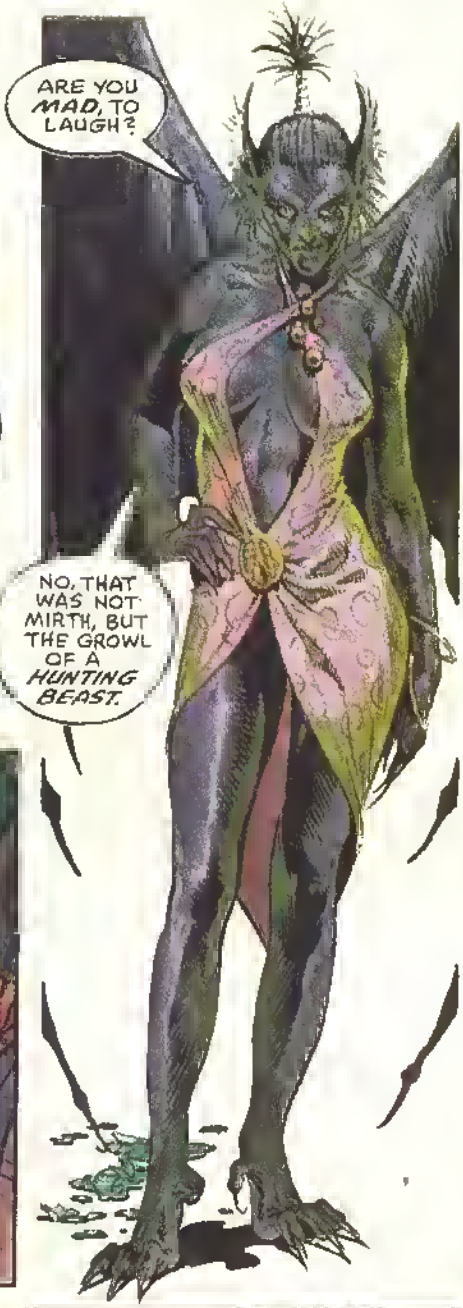

BUT, WHY DO YOU SPEAK OF ANOTHER WOMAN, WHEN YOU ARE WITH ME?
I AM NOT PLEASED!



YOU DO NOT BLENCH!?
O MAN, WHEN YASMEENA IS WROTH, BLOOD FLOWS LIKE WATER--
--AND THE VERY GODS HIDE THEIR HEADS IN HORROR!

"I laughed, then...and my laughter thrummed with blood-lust.

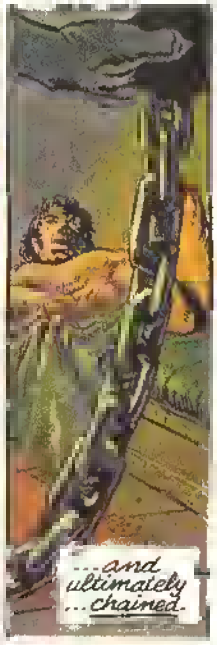
YOU INTEREST ME, ESAU CAIRN.
TAKE HIM TO HIS CHAMBER!


ARE YOU MAD, TO LAUGH?
NO, THAT WAS NOT MIRTH, BUT THE GROWL OF A HUNTING BEAST.

"And so I began my third captivity on Almuric...
"...here in the black citadel of Yugga, on the rock Yuthla, by the river of Yogh, in the land of Yagg.

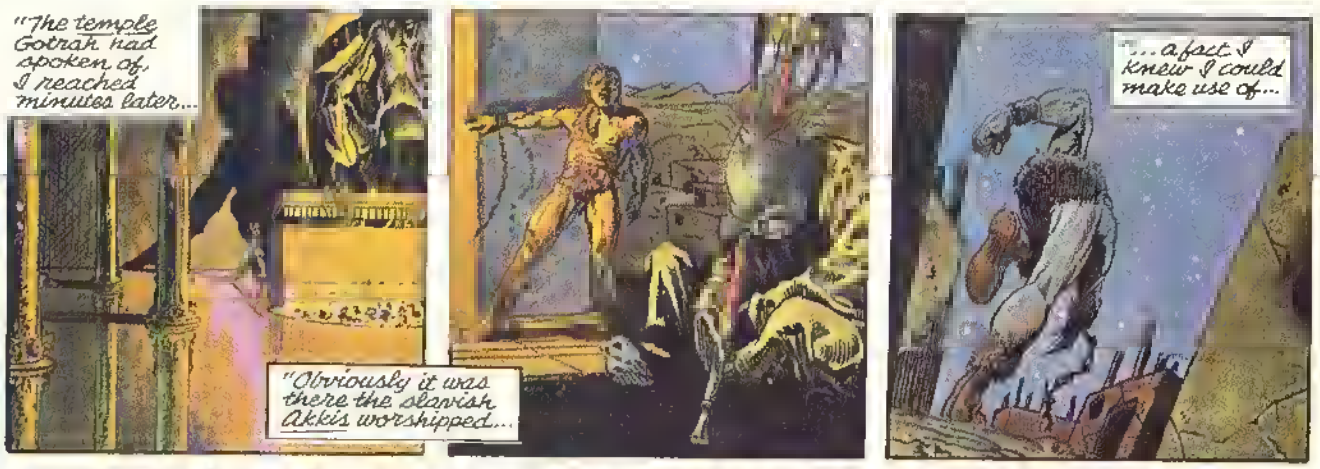
"I was bathed...

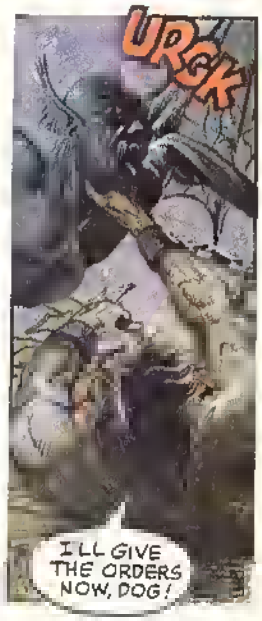
"...fed...

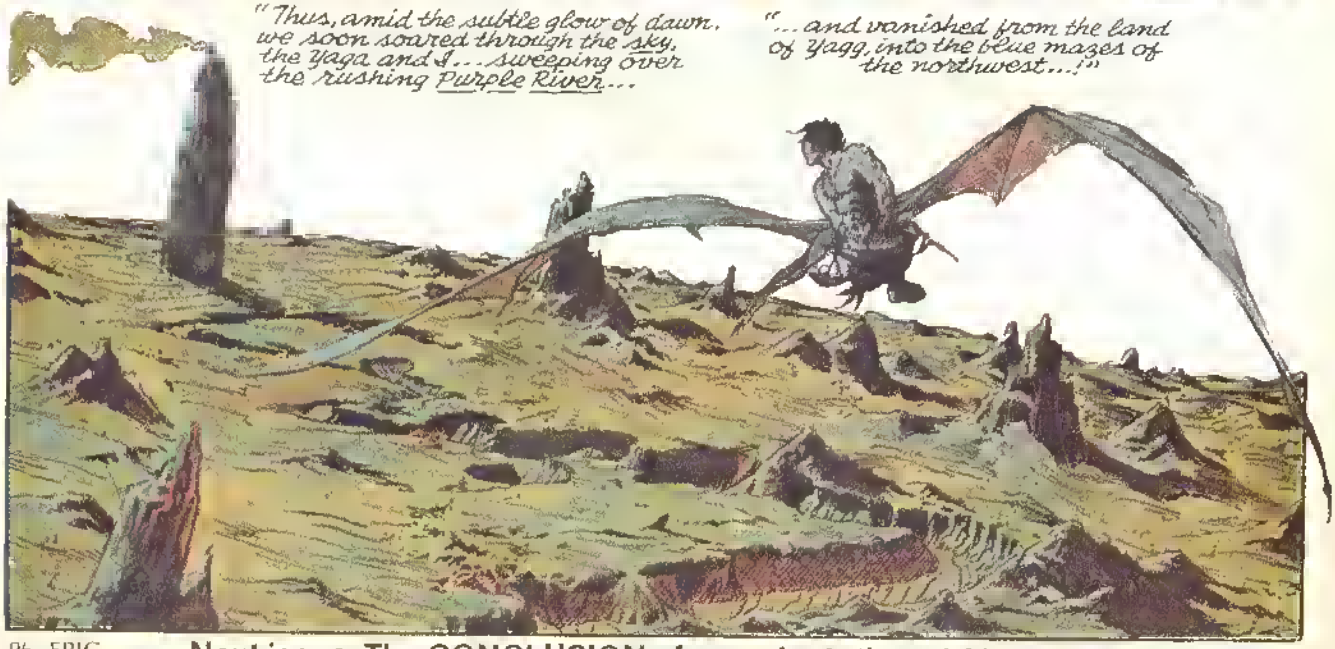

...and ultimately ...chained.

"Then...
WHY HAVE I BEEN BROUGHT BACK HERE, YASMEENA?
BECAUSE I...DESIRE YOU.
WHETHER YOU WERE QUEEN OR SLAVE, I'D RATHER SCREW A SNAKE!
A SLAVE I WOULD NEVER BE!
I WOULD SOONER LOOSE THE ULTIMATE HORROR, AND PERISH IN THE RUINS OF MY CITY!
MISTRESS--THE UNDER-LORDS WISH AUDIENCE WITH YOU.
DAMN THEM--
STILL I SUPPOSE I MUST.
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE WHILE I AM GONE.
WE'LL SEE.
"Time passed.
"I drank.
"Then...
"...a sound from behind:
WHO THE HELL--?
YOU!? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE--
--IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER, IN PLAIN SIGHT OF THE SECRET DOOR TO THE TEMPLE?

SPEAK, PALE ONE, OR I, LORD GOTRAH, WILL--
"He never finished his snarled threat--
"--unless Yagas believe in an after-life.
"Then, a mad plan seized me by the throat, even as I had seized the queen's vile major-domo...
"...and I disposed of his body in a most obvious manner.
"Just then I heard Yasmeena returning, so I hid.
"From her outcry, she thought I had fallen to my death...
"...and she set out to find my broken, rock-torn form.
"Before she found Gotrah's corpse, I had places to go.







Next issue: The CONCLUSION of our adaptation of ALMURIC